

Sing A Song, Sing Out Loud

by Dianne Armitage

[Sing, sing a song](#)

[Sing out loud](#)

[Sing out strong](#)

[Sing of good things, not bad](#)

[Sing of happy, not sad...](#)

(Words and Music by Joe Raposo)



It's probably a fair assessment that for most women facing a diagnosis of breast cancer, singing would be the furthest thing from their mind. The reality is that singing is a sort of gateway to your spirit whether you can hold a note, tend to find B flat more often than C sharp, or can even carry a tune!

It is no coincidence that nearly every religious or spiritual group uses singing as a means to connect with their version of the divine. Something very special and mysterious happens when human beings lift their voice in song.

Our culture has led most of us believe we can't sing (although, if you've watched enough American Idol, you might question this statement!) In other cultures everyone sings. Researchers have found we are one of just a few cultures where singing is not a common daily practice. People used to sing as they worked, or to entertain themselves. They sang to experience community, or to commune with God. In today's world, most of us listen as others do the singing for us.

Studies show that listening to music and song accelerates the natural healing process of the body. Song is powerful because it is a language that somehow bypasses the intellect. We understand intuitively. You don't have to involve your mind to comprehend the beauty of a song, so the body can simply relax and enjoy the process. As babies we were soothed into sleep with lullabies where our breath and the rhythm of the song became one.

Studies also suggest that music has profound effects on the emotions, thereby inducing states of relaxation which are particularly useful as an antidote to depression, anxiety and fatigue. It is highly possible that there is a connection between immuno-suppression, stress reduction, and music.

The results of a study conducted at the University of Frankfurt in Germany found that choral singing has a positive health impact. Researchers there took blood samples from chorus members before and after they sang Mozart's Requiem. The levels of immunoglobulin A and cortisol were noticeably higher, indicating enhanced immunity. At another time, the same choir was asked simply to listen to a recording of the same piece. The blood samples in this instance did not show any elevation.

Several studies have used saliva testing to compare physiological responses when someone is singing. In one such study at the University of California, Irvine (featured in the Voice, Summer 2001), choristers showed significantly increased levels of immunity-building proteins just prior to performance and even more dramatically afterward. This research was conducted with members of the Pacific Chorale in Santa Ana, California at two rehearsals and one concert over an eight-week period.

Even hospitals have begun to embrace the philosophy that singing and music can not only help patients heal, but can create a healthier environment for visitors and staff as well.

Two researchers at the French National Center for Scientific Research in Paris performed a year-and-a-half study on the effect of sound on human cancer cells. After mounting a camera on a microscope where slides of uterine cancer cells had been placed, the researchers played acoustical instruments and sang musical scales into the cells. They found the most dramatic influence on the cancer cells came from the human voice. This may explain why chanting, toning, and singing (forms of sound healing that require nothing more than the intention of your own voice), and the tone-of-voice and choice of words we use when speaking to one another seems to impact our health and well-being. In this study, it appeared that the cancer cells were not able to support a progressive accumulation after being exposed to these vibrational frequencies. The fact that the cancer

cells were unable to support themselves after they had been vibrated by sound is a strong indication that sound therapy should be more widely studied.

In many cultures the voice is very important for transformation. The mantra is highly used in both India and Tibet. Mantras are sacred sounds conserved in the ancient languages, even in languages which are no longer understood. There are certain sounds for specific illnesses or problems caused by particular beings, or mantras to bring you into a state of clarity or emptiness. Many believe that when using a mantra, you are tuning into all the other people who have ever used this mantra.

Mantra is used throughout the world, often combined with rhythmic movements of the body, and with rhythmic breathing to bring someone into a state of transcendental ecstasy or spiritual bliss. In today's church, most liturgies are chanted or sung. The Sunday services of matins, communion and evensong are also a form of mantra where we chant psalms, sing hymns and intone prayers.

Singer, songwriter and well known rocker Melissa Etheridge literally gave voice to the power of song during her recent performance at the Grammy Awards. Diagnosed with breast cancer last year, Etheridge was tapped to perform "Piece of My Heart" during a salute to Janis Joplin. With hair barely there as a result of her recent chemotherapy, she amazed the crowd with her rousing and very moving rendition of this Joplin classic. There are many who feel "Piece of My Heart" has become the anthem of breast cancer survivors everywhere, due in large part of Etheridge's performance. In a recent interview with NBC's Stone Phillips she recalled how freeing the song actually was. "The scream was so cathartic. It was such -- it was the release. Believe me! I mean, rock and roll is cathartic, anyway. Full on. But to be able to throw my head back, and scream the last six months out of me, I'm completely grateful for that."

Laura Fial, featured in this month's Grass Roots profile, fully understands the healing power of song. While she was undergoing the rigors of radiation, chemotherapy and surgery, Laura found that music and song helped her to maintain a positive outlook.

"Music has been my therapy throughout my breast cancer. You really need to get over the anger, so having positive energy is one of the most important things you can do for yourself!"

The pure physiology of singing is beneficial to the body. When we sing we have to be very conscious of the breath. The diaphragm has to expand in order to allow enough air to fill the lungs. As it expands many of our internal organs are also affected in positive ways. This also explains how singing helps to reduce stress. When we are breathing in sufficient quantities of air and expelling them in a controlled manner, the entire body begins to relax.

So whether it's karaoke, choir practice or simply singing in the shower, a song can go a long way in the healing process on both a physical and emotional level. Laura Fial would love to see singing groups formed for breast cancer patients all across the United States. For more information please feel free to contact her at: breastcancercd2000@cox.net.

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