



Singing for lung health

Music making and other creative activities can make you feel healthier and more positive. There's increasing evidence that singing regularly as part of a group is good for your general health and wellbeing. It seems to be especially good at improving your quality of life if you're living with a lung condition.

Singing as a group is good for people with no experience of singing, as well as people who have loved music-making their whole lives.

In this information, we explain how singing can help improve your breathing and wellbeing, what happens in a singing session and how you can get involved in a BLF Singing for Lung Health group.

How can singing improve my wellbeing?

There's increasing evidence that singing regularly as part of a group is good for your general health and wellbeing.

Over the last 10 years, researchers have looked at how your body and mind respond to music and have explored ways of using music to help care for health. There's increasing evidence that singing regularly as part of a group is good for your general health and wellbeing. A growing body of research suggests that group singing is especially good for people living with a long-term lung condition.

Singing can:

- improve health-related quality of life
- be a fun group activity to reduce social isolation and loneliness and an opportunity to learn new skills and songs
- help to improve posture
- increase the strength of your voice

People with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) who join singing groups say singing regularly:

- reduces their feelings of being short of breath
- helps them to feel more in control of their breathing
- helps them to manage their symptoms better

Across the UK there are now over 100 singing for lung health groups for people with lung conditions. The singing leaders who run these groups have been trained to run singing sessions that are designed to help manage your feelings of breathlessness. Other non-specialist singing groups may also be enjoyable and useful, but may not provide the full range of techniques to help you manage your lung condition better.

It's important your singing leader understands your lung condition so they can give activities that are safe for you to take part in.

Most of the research that's been done so far has been with people living with COPD. But people living with other lung conditions such as asthma and pulmonary fibrosis may also benefit from joining a singing group.

Singing for lung health group leaders aren't necessarily health care professionals. They have all received quality assured training. However, should you have a chest infection or have other concerns about your voice or health it is always best to discuss these with your GP.

You don't need to be good at singing to join a singing group! Search for a group near you at blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area or call our helpline on **03000 030 555**

Why does singing help my breathing?

Many people with lung conditions say that singing helps them to feel less short of breath and more in control of their breathing. There are 3 main ways that singing can help:

- teaching you to breathe more slowly and deeply
- improving the sense of control over your breathing, reducing anxiety and potential feelings of panic
- improving your posture to help you breathe more efficiently

When we sing, we focus on the song's words and melody. When you're lost in the music, you don't consciously think about your breathing.

Breathing more slowly and deeply

Singing has similarities to physiotherapy and the breathing techniques used for managing breathlessness and airway clearance.

In some lung conditions, like COPD, your airways are narrowed or obstructed. This can make it difficult to empty air out of your lungs when you breathe out, and air gets trapped in your lungs. If you don't empty your lungs effectively, you'll only be able to 'top up' your breath – using the top of your chest to breathe, instead of your whole lungs. This uses muscles in your neck and shoulders which can get tired quickly.

Singing long phrases helps you lengthen your outbreath to empty your lungs. This helps to reduce the amount that you use muscles in your neck and shoulders when you take your next breath in. This saves energy and makes breathing more comfortable.

Developing awareness of the muscles that support your breathing

Singing for lung health leaders teach techniques to help you use your abdominal muscles effectively when you sing. This can make your breathing at other times more efficient too.

How can singing help my symptoms?

Symptom	How the session helps	Benefits
If your voice is breathy, or you're hoarse or your vocal muscles are weaker	Exploring the reasons for the breathy sound. This may be due to poor posture or using either too much or too little air when you sing or speak. This can tire your voice, so you'll learn how to make a safe and stronger sound when you speak or sing	Your vocal strength and stamina will get better and you'll have more control over your speaking voice
You feel out of breath and worry about getting out of breath	Practicing songs that you enjoy singing with long phrases Exercises that encourage you to take a relaxed breath in with a soft belly, and then a long, slow breath out as you allow the tummy to move inwards Choosing songs that encourage you to breathe out completely then breathe in more effectively	You'll feel more in control of your breathing You'll learn techniques to breathe more efficiently
Coughing when you breathe in and out	Learning techniques such as breathing in through your nose	Less coughing by avoiding triggers such as breathing in cold air through your mouth
Feeling weak and so moving around less	Completing full body warmups and stretches to energise you before you start singing Supporting your standing and sitting posture Rhythmic movements such as clapping, stepping and swaying Incorporating movement with singing and strengthening optimal postures to help you breathe and sing better Completing warm down activities at the end of the session to relax you and to make sure any movement is done safely for you	Increasing your awareness of your core strength using your whole body to sing to strengthen muscles and improving your mobility

How can singing improve your wellbeing?

As well as helping your breathing, regular singing can have other more general benefits for your health.

Singing helps you feel more positive

People say singing is uplifting and joyful. They feel positive during the singing session, and the positive mood continues afterwards. Singing can help if you feel depressed, stressed or anxious.

Singing helps build your confidence

People living with a long-term lung condition say that group singing makes them think of themselves as choir members, rather than patients. Singing and being part of a group gives you confidence and a sense of achievement and can be a distraction from your lung condition. It can motivate you to try other activities.

Singing helps you feel part of a group

Regular group singing can make you feel less isolated and is a way of feeling part of a group. You can make new friends. They'll understand your challenges because they face them too. It's also a chance for you to share your own experiences and help others.

Singing gives you a new skill

Joining a singing group is a way of learning new skills and maybe reviving existing ones. Learning new songs can help to improve your ability to focus and concentrate and also to stimulate your memory. You may also discover a new world of music you've never experienced before!

What happens in a singing for lung health session?

Singing for lung health sessions will cover a variety of breathing exercises, songs and relaxation techniques. Singing for lung health sessions are designed to be enjoyable and stimulating, as well as to help with your symptoms.

Warm-up

The session will start with a warm-up to prepare your body for activity and get you ready to sing. This will probably include:

- physical warm-ups
- breathing exercises
- vocal exercises such as rhythm and pitch games (exercises like tongue twisters and singing up and down notes of the scale)

The breathing exercises will help you to control your feelings of breathlessness and coordinate your breath with movement. Warming up also helps to get your voice ready to sing. When singing you use muscles all over your body, so it's very important to warm up.

Songs

Your singing for lung health leader will choose songs that are suitable for people with a lung condition, as well as being fun. Some songs will be sung in a call and response format so you can listen and repeat what the leader sings without having to read or think about what's coming next.

Exercises for you to try at home!

First, make sure you're comfortable and ready for your singing exercises. Sit at the front of a hard chair (like a kitchen table chair). Notice your breath and any tension in your body. Picture the tension melting away.

If you can, stand up with your feet hip width apart and your arms by your side. Stretch your arms up and yawn. Repeat.

Lift your shoulders to your ears and let them drop with a big huffing sound. Repeat.

Circle your shoulders (one at time). Do 2 circles in one direction, then 2 the other way.

Make a deep sigh, as if you've just got into a warm bath.

Put a 'sh' sound onto your sigh, like a wave. At the end, relax and release your stomach muscles to let the breath back in.

Now, turn this into singing a long 'shee' sound. Relax your tummy at the end to let the breath back in. Place your hands on your belly and imagine a rope passing through you like a tail. Imagine someone pulling on the rope as you sing 'shee' to a count of 4, then the rope is released and your stomach springs back. Repeat 6 times.

Picture the rope again and sing 'I can sing for one', 'I can sing for one, two', 'I can sing for one, two, three' – see how far you can get. Don't forget to release the rope (and your stomach muscles) at the end of each phrase.

Want to sing a song? Pick one and have fun! Notice where you need to take a breath and think about the rope pulling in and releasing to help your breathing.

Don't worry about what you sound like – what it feels like is most important!

You can buy this Singing for Breathing CD from the Royal Brompton at www.rbhcharity.org/shop/singing-for-breathing-audio-cd. It contains warm-ups, breathing and vocal exercises and songs. It's not a substitute for a singing session, but if you can't attend or would like to practice at home it's a good place to start.

How can I join a singing group?

You don't need any musical ability or experience to join a singing group. Some people are reluctant to give it a go because they feel they can't sing.

But you don't need to be an amazing singer to benefit from learning the breathing exercises, singing in a group, and meeting other people with a lung condition. And you may find that you can sing better than you think!

You can search for a group near you or call our helpline on **03000 030 555**, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm. The groups listed are either supported by the BLF or independent.

- a BLF-supported group is described as "led by a local singing leader who has taken part in our singing programme". This means the leader has been trained to lead singing groups for people with lung conditions.
- We list some independent singing groups so as many people as possible can access this type of support. You may find joining an independent singing group or choir fun, but we can't comment on their ability to improve your health or wellbeing.

Find the nearest singing group for lung health near you at **[blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-in-your-area)**

How can I become a singing for lung health leader?

If you're interested in becoming a singing group leader, you can take part singing for lung health training with The Musical Breath at **www.themusicalbreath.com**

The Musical Breath was established by Phoebe Cave, who created and delivers the BLF singing for lung health training. The Musical Breath operates throughout the UK. It delivers training and workshops using respiratory, music and voice specialists.

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

[blf.org.uk](https://www.blf.org.uk)

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **[blf.org.uk](https://www.blf.org.uk)**