

## Sing your way to better health

[Alina Paul, MD](#), has been singing for as long as she can remember. She added guitar while in boarding school in India.

Fast forward to 2023, and the family medicine physician at OSF HealthCare finds herself singing for patients who request it to brighten their day.

"It has changed the way I treat patients," Dr. Paul says with conviction. "Singing and playing guitar is medicine. It's medicine for the soul."

Hearing those tunes is not just a temporary respite for the person in for a checkup. Dr. Paul says research has shown singing can have long-term health benefits.

### The benefits

- Pain levels, physical and mental, can decrease. For people suffering from anxiety and depression, singing can increase the level of endorphins, the "feel-good hormone," as Dr. Paul puts it. This brings them out of a dreary mood.
- Some research has shown that singing can boost immunity by increasing the level of the antibody immunoglobulin A. This antibody helps fight respiratory and other infections, Dr. Paul says.
- It helps your lungs perform better.

"We're using our lungs to sing. We take deep breaths. Certain movements of the chest wall help with lung function," says Dr. Paul.

- Other research has found singing can help stave off moderate dementia, Dr. Paul says.

"That's amazing," she says.

"We see a lot of patients with dementia. When you incorporate singing or even sing to them, their memory seems to improve. They're happier," Dr. Paul adds.

- Dr. Paul says singing can increase oxytocin, the so-called "love hormone." This can help with social bonding and a sense of belonging.
- Singing can also improve public speaking skills, especially if you sing in front of others. Simply put, the more you use your voice, the more comfortable you are with it.

### Keep your well-being in mind

Dr. Paul says there are some obvious, but important health matters to keep in mind if you pick up singing.

- If singing causes your lungs or throat to hurt, take a break. If minor symptoms persist, go to an urgent care. For things like difficulty breathing, chest pain or loss of consciousness, call 9-1-1.
- If you are sick, don't sing – or do much else – around others. When we say words, our mouth spews microparticles that can carry diseases. And when you're sick, you should be resting and recovering.
- Be kind to your neighbors, like in an apartment building. Don't sing loudly at all hours.

**How do I start?**

Don't feel like you have to run out and join a choir, Dr. Paul says. And don't worry if your vocal skills aren't Grammy worthy.

"Don't take it as an exercise. Don't do it because you have to. Do it because you want to do it," Dr. Paul advises.

Try singing while in the car or shower. Do karaoke with friends. You don't even need music. Try belting out your favorite song acapella while cleaning the house. Dr. Paul says closing your eyes can help focus the activity.

"Anybody can sing. Make a point to sing. It's like meditation. It's very beneficial," Dr. Paul says.