**VoiceFit**

**Fitness and Fun** would love to get everyone singing this year to help raise money for the improvement of health in their local communities *(for Fitness and Fun community contact information, see the Participating Fitness and Fun locations and contacts table on Page )*. The focus is the national fundraising campaign taking place over the summer, and it’s called **VoiceFit**.

**C:\Users\teresa\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\RAQGN2IF\MCj00787610000[1].wmf** VoiceFit is a community choir event that is open to all open Fitness and Fun members. Each event includes instruction, social interaction, and community building, and culminates in a one-hour performance by all participants to end off the event. The funds raised from VoiceFit will help people in the local community, but there’s an unexpected bonus – *those who participate will experience health benefits themselves!*

# The Health Benefits of Participating in a VoiceFit Event

## What happens to our bodies when we sing?

Doctor Gillian Busby is Head of Research in the Department of Music at the University of Witham. She has been carrying out extensive studies on the beneficial health aspects of singing for over 15 years.

In Dr Busby’s latest book, she explains how “the benefits of singing are not just psychological but physical too. Singing is an aerobic activity, thus increasing the amount of oxygen in the blood, which in turn improves cardiovascular health. And if you are using the correct technique and posture, the act of singing also works the major muscle groups in the upper body – especially the abdominals”.

Geoff Couther from The Couther Voice Academy in Northampton suggests that regular exercising of the vocal cords is an excellent way to keep fit, because you are exercising your heart and your lungs when you sing. Correct diaphragmatic breathing increases lung capacity and can also promote a healthy lymphatic system and can help to improve posture and even clear the respiratory system. See Geoff’s fascinating article in ‘The Vocal Gazette’ for more information.

Couther notes that a study conducted at the University of Frankfurt showed higher levels of immune system proteins (Immunoglobulin A and Cortisol) in choir members who had just performed a complex classical piece. However, simply listening to the same piece of music did not have this effect.

## Yodel for youthfulness

One of Geoff Couther’s vocal tutors, Gracie Young, says: “Your face gets a fabulous workout while you are singing, so forget costly plastic surgery and get your vocal cords moving instead! Also, several studies have even shown that people who sing regularly, especially in choral groups, may have increased life expectancy.

A recent report concluded that this was related not only to the physical benefits but the improved mental state resulting from singing participation.



## Happy harmonies

Dr Busby’s book also explains how the circulation of endorphins (the ‘feel good’ hormones) around your body is increased during singing, and additional psychological benefits can occur when people sing together in groups, due to an increased sense of belonging, community, and shared purpose.

If you sing with others there is also the opportunity to develop your ability to sing in harmony, so that even the brain gets a work-out too! If you feel nervous about singing in harmony you can practice with a teaching CD first – try searching for ‘harmony singing’ on Amazon and see what comes up!

# Your Vocal Cords Can Help Your Community

Esther Picard, Senior Fundraising Manager at Fitness and Fun says; “Why not sing to help raise money for community health improvement, and experience the benefits yourself at the same time?”

If you would like to participate in the VoiceFit events this summer, just let us know by filling out the form below. We’ll send you a free information pack containing everything you need to get started including:

* VoiceFit posters and car stickers
* CD and words for the VoiceFit theme song
* Guidance on how to arrange events such as:
  + a sponsored sing-in
  + karaoke in the workplace
  + joint local choir events
  + group sing-ins at local concert venues
  + singing at your local folk club

# VoiceFit Event Dates

* **Event 1** – June 30
* **Event** **2** – July 9
* **Event** **3** – July 21
* **Event** **4** – Aug 27

# Participating Locations

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Participating Fitness and Fun locations and contacts | | |
| Witham | Heather Ainsley | hainsley@fitfun.com |
| Baywood | Jake Edelson | jedelson@fitfun.com |
| Markville | Daisy LaRue | dlarue@fitfun.com |
| Thorndale | Shondra Mills | smills@fitfun.com |
| Torresdale | Charlie Yu | cyu@fitfun.com |

# VoiceFit Registration Form

**First Name: Last Name:**

**Email Address:**

**Today’s Date:**

**Preferred Event Date:**

**Preferred Location:**

**Singing Skill Level:**

**Registration Confirmation:**

, we will contact you via email to confirm your registration no later than 2 weeks after receipt of this form.

Please click the SUBMIT button and send your entry to the contact for your preferred location.

# Tips for Getting Ready for a VoiceFit Event

Once you’ve signed up for an event, you should read over the following information to prepare your body and vocal cords and to ensure that you have the best experience possible. We know you’re going to love it!

## Keep hydrated

Keeping hydrated is particularly important for singers because the vocal folds must be lubricated in order to work properly. This isn’t just about drinking water but trying to ensure that the air around you is not too dry.

Here are some guidelines:

****

* Drink two liters of water each day, more during singing.
* Avoid ice cold water – room temperature is better.
* Avoid too many dairy products as these can increase the production of mucus.
* Keep salty foods to a minimum as these can exacerbate dehydration.
* When you inhale, try to do so through your nose – this allows the air you intake to warm and moisten before it passes over your vocal system.
* Avoid smoky environments and if you smoke – try to stop!
* Use a humidifier in the room where you sing. Well-watered house plants are good too!
* If your voice is tired, rest it if possible.

## General health

* Try to get 8 hours of sleep a day but avoid singing soon after waking – if possible allow a few hours between getting up and starting to sing.
* Always warm up the voice before you sing – especially before a performance.
* Avoid shouting and trying to talk over loud background noise.
* Stretch neck and shoulder muscles throughout the day.
* Singing is also good for your health according to extensive research by Dr Gillian Busby of the University of Witham.

## Be aware

Find out more about the physical mechanisms involved when you use your voice. According to an article by renowned vocal coach Geoff Couther, we are exercising our heart as well as our lungs when we sing, and correct breathing increases lung capacity and can clear the respiratory system and improve posture.

## Preparing to sing

### Warming up

It’s always worth spending some time in physical warm-up activities. It helps to focus your mind and body on the task in hand. There is a useful website set up by the charity Voices Without Limits that’s full of easy-to-follow and helpful exercises for singers of all ages – highly recommended!

### Stretching and Relaxing

Singing makes certain demands on the body and being relaxed and energized helps the body meet these demands. Exercises which loosen up the joints and the muscles and improve circulation are ideal. Stretching all the limbs is ideal, though you should never use forced movements.

C:\Users\teresa\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\1FP6V5UX\MCSL01376_0000[1].wmf

### Breathing

Good breathing is fundamental to good singing! A ‘good’ breath is one taken through an open mouth and with an open throat – as if you are about to yawn. Yawning is contagious so don’t be afraid to start with a good strong yawn and watch it spread around the group!

A good breath is also a deep breath, but this does not mean hunching up the shoulders to try and make space for the air – instead, aim to expand the area around the lower ribs so that the diaphragm is working. If you place your hands at the bottom of your rib cage, one on each side, and then take a deep breath, you should feel your hands being pushed out – try doing this without moving your shoulders!

### Good Vibrations

The larynx itself makes only a very small sound, so it’s the job of the head and chest to amplify this sound. When we speak, we use our ‘chest voice’ but in singing we need the sound to resonate in the head as well.

Good sounds to practice during warm-up are the long vowels ‘oo’ and ‘ee’, because these naturally resonate in the head. You could try warming up with these two vowels combined with the consonants n, m, l, and v, since these also contribute to head resonance. Try to feel the vibration on your chest and head as you practise vocalizing these consonants and vowels – very gently at first, and choose any pattern of notes at this early stage of the warm-up.

A recent interview with Miss Gracie Young, an experienced vocal tutor and performer, revealed that her favourite vocal warm-up is to sing the National Anthem all on the same note, emphasising the consonants and drawing out the vowels. Gracie began singing and performing at the age of 6 and is still going strong at 86, and says that singing keeps her young!