

# Why it's healthy to sing this holiday season

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One of the highlights of Katy Cadman's week is conducting two-hour-long MomChoir practice sessions with more than 50 other women.

When all the voices come together for a song such as *All I want for Christmas is You*, the effect can be electrifying, says Cadman, the Vancouver choir's artistic director.

"You leave just buzzing with excitement and enthusiasm and this feeling of camaraderie," she says.

The high Cadman describes matches what researchers are learning in their labs: Singing has powerful effects on the brain, and it may provide a potent antidote to modern maladies such as stress, loneliness and depression.

More than other social activities such as team sports or card games, group singing seems to have the ability to generate feelings of social connectedness, says Dr. Frank Russo, a professor of psychology at Ryerson University. When done in unison, he says, it synchronizes singers' breathing and heart rates. The auditory and motor areas of their brains spontaneously fire in time with one another. Their levels of the stress hormone cortisol decrease, while oxytocin, also known as the "love hormone," increases. Moreover, studies have shown people can withstand more pain after group singing.