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YOUR TIME/HEALTH

Does Poetry Make The Heart Grow Stronger?

By [DAVID BJERKLIE](#)

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Monday, Aug. 02, 2004

Yes, reciting epic Greek poetry such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey actually seems to be good for the heart — at least according to a new study by a team of European researchers. It all has to do with breathing patterns and their relationship to cardiac rhythms. It turns out that reciting poetry — especially verse like Homer's that follows a specific rhythm called hexameter — makes an excellent breathing exercise. The authors of the study taught healthy volunteers to recite passages from Homer while walking and lifting their arms with each breath. The result was an increase in the synchronization of certain cardiorespiratory patterns that are believed to be favorable to the long-term prognosis of cardiac patients. There was less of this synchronization with controlled-breathing exercises alone and almost none during normal, spontaneous breathing. Whether or not you like the poetry probably doesn't matter.

From the Aug. 02, 2004 issue of TIME magazine

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