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#### Study finds reciting poetry calms the heart

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - While the rhythmic sounds of poetry may woo a lover's heart, it might also be healthy for the heart of the speaker, according to recent study findings.

"Our findings suggest that the stress-releasing effect of guided recitation of old poetry can lead to a deep relaxation afterwards," Dietrich von Bonin of the University of Berne in Switzerland and Dr. Henrik Bettermann of the University of Witten/Herdecke in Germany told Reuters Health in an e-mail interview.

"This effect could be beneficial not only in stress management but also for the prevention of heart disease and other illnesses related to irregular breathing," they added.

The researchers investigated the effects of poetry on heart rate in a study of seven individuals. After having their heart rates measured for a 15-minute period, the study participants recited poetry for 30 minutes, or spent the same amount of time engaged in conversation. Then their heart rates were measured again, also for 15 minutes.

After reciting poetry, the study participants' heart rates slowed to match their breathing rates in "harmonic interaction," according to the authors. Further, this effect persisted for up to 15 minutes after the recitation exercises, the investigators report in the *International Journal of Cardiology*.

No similar effects were observed when the individuals engaged in everyday conversation, the researchers noted.

In light of the findings, "we recommend to foster old skills like recitation of rhythmic poetry not only in therapy but also in education, in order to optimize early prevention of heart disease and other stress-related problems," von Bonin and Bettermann said.

These findings may also help explain the calming effect of chanting, the researchers note, "since chanting of calming songs also generates a slow and deeper breathing."

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