

The influence of music therapy on our health and well-being

[Health & Medicine](#), [Mental Health](#)



As far back as biblical history man has listened to music. In fact, King Saul sent for David to play the harp when his soul was troubled. Music has served to express emotions such as joy or sorrow and has done so very effectively. Music has been a tool of communication in this way, helping one man to understand another and providing a medium of interconnection. Every known society throughout history has had some form of music. Humans were already playing such complex instruments as bone flutes, jaw harps and percussive instruments long ago in the earliest civilizations. Music has had an influence over people since it was first invented. It has been used in every culture and in every nation on the planet. Today music is used in the medical world to help patients relax, relieve pain, confusion and anxiety. Music is also now commonly used in counseling or therapy. Music therapy techniques such as guided listening or improvisational playing and are used to aid in treating many types of mental disorders, from depression to schizophrenia. Many of the healing qualities of music therapy are connected to its use as a nonverbal form of communication. Music is translated differently in the brain than nonmusical tones and it connects to a variety of areas of the brain. Listening to music has been found to influence learning as well. A study of grade point averages in students who listened to music while studying and those who did not found no significant difference unless the students were listening to hip-hop and rap or classical and easy listening. The grade point averages of the students listening to hip-hop and rap were significantly lower than those who listen to easy listening and classical music.

Music has been perceived to have transcendental qualities, and has thus been used pervasively within forms of religious worship. Music is a unique

gift to and from each person who creates it. It reveals vast quantities of information about the performer, from their mood swings to biochemistry, inner rhythms of organs, and even the way they are physically built. Music is an ever-changing, ever-increasing gift from God, free and available to all who seek it and many who do not. As such, it is naturally endowed with the ability to affect those who listen in monumental ways.

Music for Healing

Music has been associated with physical and emotional healing throughout history. The ancient Greeks assigned the god Apollo to reign over both music and healing. Ancient shamanic curative rituals used rhythmically repetitive music to facilitate trance induction. Aristotle and Plato both prescribed music to debilitated individuals. Plato prescribed both music and dancing for the fearful and anxious, while Aristotle spoke of the power of music to restore health and normalcy Music on Humans 5 to those who suffer from uncontrollable emotions and compared it to a medical treatment.

Physiologically, music has a distinct effect on many biological processes. It inhibits the occurrence of fatigue, as well as changes the pulse and respiration rates, external blood pressure levels, and psychogalvanic effect. However, music is not limited to changing the body's responses in only one direction. The nature of the music influences the change as well. Pitch, tempo, and melodic pattern all influence music's effect on mood and physical processes. For instance, high pitch, acceleration of rhythm, and ascending melodic passages are all generally felt to increase anxiety and tension and sometimes even lead to loss of control and panic. The makers of

arcade and video games commonly exploit this effect by increasing tempo and pitch on ascending melodies during a time of high pressure and necessity of precision in performance to succeed. Inversely, music with low pitch generally produces a calming effect. Slow tempos and descending melodies often cause feelings of sadness and depression. Some explain this effect on the body by comparing the music to a mirror of the body's motor responses. When a person feels depressed he moves slowly, while when he is anxious his heart and respiration rates race. Furthermore, music has been found to produce a relaxed mood and stress reduction, making it a plausible way to accommodate coping with pain and anxiety.

Music and medicine

Music has been put to use in hospitals, nursing homes, and many other places where stress levels rise. In fact, a Norwegian study displayed a higher affinity for music in medical students than other university graduates. At Music on Humans 6 least 18% of the medical graduates studied played one or more instruments regularly. Medical students are well known for experiencing very high stress levels, so it is natural that they would be more accustomed to engaging in more stress-relieving activities, and sharing such activities with their patients. The modern use of music therapy in hospitals developed during the 1950s in Europe and the United States. Many physicians began to use a multidisciplinary approach to medicine and, recognizing the soothing effect of music, provided music therapy to patients who were thought to have an interest in music. Studies have found that music is effective in decreasing stress preoperatively, postoperatively, and

generally for the patient and the family members and friends. Patients who listened to music while waiting for surgery subjectively reported lower anxiety and also displayed lower blood pressure and pulse rates than those who did not. Generally, persons who listened to music during a hospital stay displayed lower anxiety scores than those who did not. Postoperative patients have pointed out the comforting aspect of music, and described a greater sense of control of their surroundings. Music is even effective in antenatal clinics. Hearing live performances of music significantly increased the number of accelerations in the fetal heartbeat, signaling good health. Infants as young as two months incline their attention toward pleasant consonant sounds and away from unpleasant dissonant sounds.

Music for the elderly

The elderly benefit especially from postoperative music. Many elderly patients experience severe confusion or delirium during postoperative recovery, but postoperative music has been proven to lessen such cases. Music has displayed an effect of significant decrease in physiological stress indicators, and study participants have described lessened and more manageable or even absent pain in the presence of music. Music therapy has been incorporated into numerous different residential and adult day care centers. The therapy has had a significant effect on reducing aggression and agitation among residents. Music has also found a venue in the palliative care setting. Patients and family members listening to music have displayed improvements in pain, anxiety, grief, and unresolved issues and concerns.