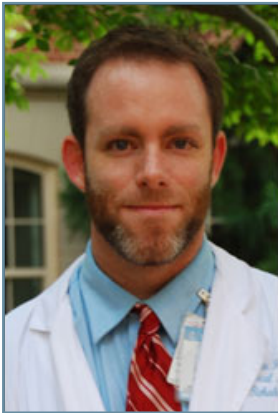


Words about Wellness

UNC DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND REHABILITATION

Ways Music Helps Our Mental and Physical Health



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Music is one of the few truly universal human joys. In addition to just being truly enjoyable, listening to music improves your health. Hopefully this is a small bit of good news to keep your spirits up, and you'll use this as inspiration to bring some music into your wellness routine! Here is a brief review of some literature on music and wellness:

1. Music Improves our Mood

Music makes us feel better. That's probably not news to you. One of the most common reasons why people listen to music is to control their mood.¹ But researchers have uncovered several specific ways music influences mood. It alleviates feelings of restlessness, nervousness, and anxiety, and it reduces worrying.² In fact, these effects are even stronger for people dealing with something particularly troubling. People with chronic illness or severe stress are happier, less depressed, and less lonely after receiving music-based therapy.³

1. Music Makes Exercise More Fun

On the other end of using music to control our mood, many people listen to fast, loud music when they work out. Studies have even found that people enjoy exercise

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much more while listening to music.⁴ That's important because enjoying an exercise routine plays a big role in how much we benefit from it. If exercising isn't fun, we have a hard time sticking to it.⁵ If fast, loud music or high intensity workouts aren't your thing, no problem. Studies have found that a range of musical styles work for a range of exercises.⁴

1. Music Lowers Heart Rate, Blood Pressure, and Stress Hormone Levels

If we're using music to relax, rather than to get us through a set of burpees, it can actually calm down our body as well as our mind. Many studies have found that listening to music can return elevated heart rate and blood pressure back to normal levels.² Music can also reduce stress hormones like cortisol and epinephrine, which control the body's fight or flight responses.⁶ How music influences these physiological systems is not yet clear but one interesting theory involves our bodies synchronizing with the pronounced rhythms in the songs we listen to.⁷

1. Music Helps With Aging

Playing a musical instrument has become a popular practice for people experiencing cognitive symptoms or impairment during aging. Studies have found that music performance improves memory and attention in such cases.⁸ Likewise, regularly listening to music seems to improve quality of life and mood, and reduce loneliness and depressive symptoms in healthy older adults.³

1. Music Reduces Pain

Music has also grown in popularity as a means of dealing with severe and chronic pain. For patients recovering from surgery, or receiving cancer treatment, a range of options are available. In "music medicine," specific pre-recorded music is selected for targeted symptoms, while in "music therapy" a professional therapist tailors a music experience for the patient. These practices have been able to reduce pain levels and even opioid drug use⁹ Simply picking out our own favorite music can reduce pain as well, for chronic conditions like back injuries.¹⁰

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