

Music Therapy

A Song in My Heart

by *Winston J. Craig*

Music can elicit positive physiological and emotional responses. Listening to instrumental music can effectively improve one's mood and reduce pain perception. Finding time to enjoy a favorite musical CD can help one relax after a frustrating and tension-filled day at work or school. Research shows that people experience greater stress release when listening to live music rather than taped music.

Appropriate music has additional benefits. Recent reports have shown that music can improve one's memory and increase attention span. Premature, low-birth-weight infants also demonstrated improved weight gain when regularly exposed to singing. Furthermore, college students who actively participated in singing and playing musical instruments experienced a more positive boost to their immune system than that experienced by those who simply listened to music. This effect is possibly due to the increased breathing pattern and greater physical activity required in active participation.

The type of music you listen to can also make a big difference. Researchers found that music played in a major key with a rapid tempo can induce feelings of happiness, while music played in a minor key with a slow tempo induces feelings of sadness. In addition, consonant music was found to stimulate the pleasure center of the brain while dissonant music stimulated parts of the limbic system associated with negative emotions.

Much like exercise, music may prove to be a simple, cost-effective, therapeutic modality for chronic pain sufferers. Music provides a meaningful distraction from pain and enables pain sufferers to enjoy a better quality of life. Music therapy has been shown to be an effective way to alleviate tension headaches, ameliorate depression, reduce pre-operative anxiety, and improve the mood and decrease pain perception in cancer patients, burn patients, and post-operative patients. Music also has a cathartic role by evoking positive, emotional experiences. The quality of life for hospice patients diagnosed with terminal cancer was substantially higher in those who received music therapy compared to those who did not.

J.C. Penney, while rehabilitating at Battle Creek Sanitarium from chronic fatigue and depression, received spiritual help, healing, and a new energy for life after listening to gospel singing in the Sanitarium chapel. Often King David, surrounded by difficult circumstances, also found comfort and confidence for the future through his musical experiences. Paul admonishes us to sing and make music in our heart to the Lord (see Ephesians 5:19). Experiencing blessings from God can lead us to sing praises to Him which, in turn, increases our trust in Him (Psalm 40:2, 3).

Winston Craig, Ph.D., R.D., is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.

Music can reduce pain perception and boost the immune system.

Playing appropriate music can be a form of stress management