Music and Your Body: How Music Affects Us and Why Music Therapy Promotes Health

How and Why Is Music A Good Tool For Health?

By Elizabeth Scott, M.S.
Stress Management Expert

Research has shown that music has a profound effect on your body and psyche. In fact, there’s a growing field of health care known as music therapy, which uses music to heal. Those who practice music therapy are finding a benefit in using music to help cancer patients, children with ADD, and others, and even hospitals are beginning to use music and music therapy to help with pain management, to help ward off depression, to promote movement, to calm patients, to ease muscle tension, and for many other benefits that music and music therapy can bring. This is not surprising, as music affects the body and mind in many powerful ways. The following are some of effects of music, which help to explain the effectiveness of music therapy:

• Brain Waves: Research has shown that music with a strong beat can stimulate brainwaves to resonate in sync with the beat, with faster beats bringing sharper concentration and more alert thinking, and a slower tempo promoting a calm, meditative state. Also, research has found that the change in brainwave activity levels that music can bring can also enable the brain to shift speeds more easily on its own as needed, which means that music can bring lasting benefits to your state of mind, even after you’ve stopped listening.

• Breathing and Heart Rate: With alterations in brainwaves comes changes in other bodily functions. Those governed by the autonomic nervous system, such as breathing and heart rate can also be altered by the changes music can bring. This can mean slower breathing, slower heart rate, and an activation of the relaxation response, among other things. This is why music and music therapy can help counteract or
prevent the damaging effects of chronic stress, greatly promoting not only relaxation, but health.

• State of Mind: Music can also be used to bring a more positive state of mind, helping to keep depression and anxiety at bay. This can help prevent the stress response from wreaking havoc on the body, and can help keep creativity and optimism levels higher, bringing many other benefits.

• Other Benefits: Music has also been found to bring many other benefits, such as lowering blood pressure (which can also reduce the risk of stroke and other health problems over time), boost immunity, ease muscle tension, and more. With so many benefits and such profound physical effects, it’s no surprise that so many are seeing music as an important tool to help the body in staying (or becoming) healthy.

Using Music Therapy:
With all these benefits that music can carry, it’s no surprise that music therapy is growing in popularity. Many hospitals are using music therapists for pain management and other uses. Music therapists help with several other issues as well, including stress. For more information on music therapy, visit the American Music Therapy Association's website.

Using Music On Your Own:
While music therapy is an important discipline, you can also achieve many benefits from music on your own. Music can be used in daily life for relaxation, to gain energy when feeling drained, for catharsis when dealing with emotional stress, and in other ways as well. This article on music, relaxation and stress management can explain more of how music can be an especially effective tool for stress management, and can be used in daily life.
Journal Prompt/Experiment

For this journal entry, you will be conducting a music therapy experiment for two days while you are at home doing homework. On one day, do your homework while listening to a fast paced song. On another day, do your homework listening to a slow song. Answer these questions for each day:

1. Which song did you listen to? (Title and Artist)
2. How did the song make you feel and why?
3. Were you more or less productive then normal while doing your homework by listening to this song? Explain.
4. Did you enjoy listening to music while doing homework? Why or why not?
5. (Only answer this question after you finished your second experiment) Which song did you prefer working to and why?

Write both entries in one Word document at home, email it or save it to a flash drive, then bring it to school to upload to Your Pdrive.