

TO YOUR HEALTH

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The Transformative Power of Music

By Gwen Healy, Music Therapist, MT-BC

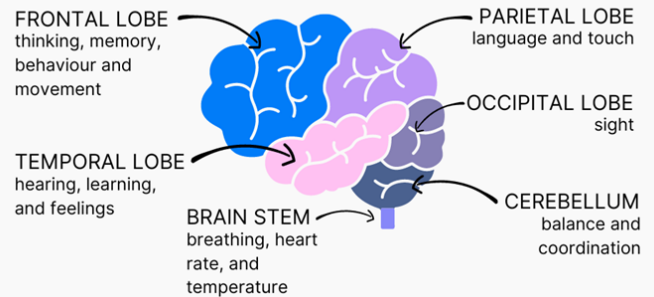
We have all witnessed or experienced the power of music firsthand in many aspects of our lives. It is considered a universal language, one we can all speak, experience, and feel. So, what is it about music that has us hooked? And how does its power affect us until our very last breath?

Music positively impacts our physical, mental, and emotional health. It can not only boost our mood, but our cognitive functioning. This means music literally makes our brains work better. Singing in a choir can reduce stress and anxiety, improve social connections to foster a sense of community, and boost overall health. Studies show that active music engagement (listening to or participating in music) is a natural pain reliever and mood booster, due to the release of endorphins. With facilitation from a music therapist, these effects can be even greater. Music therapy is the clinical application of music by a board-certified music therapist (MT-BC) to address various domains of life, such as cognitive, motor, sensory, speech/language, social, and emotional. A music therapist can work with any age, diagnosis, or population to work on both musical and non-musical goals.

Music listening or music making is a whole brain activity - it engages every part, or lobe, of the brain. This means that someone living with Alzheimer's and/or dementia can continue to engage in and benefit from music long into the disease progression, as it stimulates speech/language, memory recall and cognition.

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Music Activates Your Entire Brain



The benefits of music are endless. Here are some other things music can help:

- Regulate emotions
- Reduce depression and anxiety
- Enhance quality of life
- Improve communication/language skills
- Enhance social or community connections
- Improve sleep
- Improve or maintain memory functioning

A Sound Prescription

By Maeve Lobo, LICSW

Beethoven famously said, "*I shall hear in heaven.*" A reasonable expectation from a man who composed symphonies in near silence, relying solely on the vibrations of the piano and an iron will. For most of us, thankfully, we can appreciate and enjoy the benefits of music right here in our lifetimes.

A 2024 University of Michigan poll revealed that for older adults, music offers stress relief, emotional lift, and, apparently, a surprisingly high-energy jolt. Over 75% of respondents said music helped them relax, while 73% claimed it brought them joy. Most described it as an emotional pick-me-up, the sonic

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equivalent of an espresso. It's also telling that those who reported feeling isolated or in poor physical health were less connected with music. Older Black and Hispanic adults reported a strong attachment to music, often expressing that bond by singing in choirs. Music doesn't just move us; it metabolizes loneliness and hydrates our soul. It adds to the daily rhythm of our lives.

Rhythm, it turns out, isn't just for jazz musicians and toddlers with wooden spoons. The way we walk, speak, and chew are all guided by natural rhythms. Similarly, our brains operate with its own inner percussion system—known as neural oscillations—to process and communicate information. That's why rhythmic activities like Drum Therapy are catching on. Early studies



show drumming may benefit people with Parkinson's Disease, while Taiko drumming, once reserved for martial arts films and temple festivals, is being used as complementary

therapy for cancer patients. Drum circles have graduated from college quads to clinical settings, popping up in places like the National Health Service in Wales, the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and the University of Arizona Cancer Center.

If your brain has been coasting in neutral, consider kickstarting it with unfamiliar musical terrain. K-pop, hip hop, techno, trance—genres that may sound like side effects on a pharmaceutical ad, but are beloved by younger generations. The next time you chat with your grandchildren, ask them about their Spotify playlists. Their music may sound wildly different from the classics of the '50s and '60s—maybe even a little jarring—but this dissonance is the point. Cognitive novelty, after all, is mental exercise. Looking for bonus points? Drop a reference to ATEEZ, a South Korean boy band, and their hit single "Work." You'll be met with either stunned admiration or cautious suspicion, both of which qualify as "connection."

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Of course, if your musical tastes lean more medieval than millennial, there's a world of contemplative sound awaiting. Gregorian chanting offers monastic calm without requiring vows of silence. Tibetan throat singing may sound like a didgeridoo with feelings, but its deep vibrations are oddly centering. Singing bowls, a Buddhist sound practice, have been used in Tibet for centuries to reduce anxiety. Or immerse yourself in a traditional Indian Raga—a form so sophisticated, it tailors itself to your mood and the time of day. It's like Spotify designed by sages.

In short, music is a medicine cabinet of memory, mood, and mindfulness—all without a prescription. Though don't be surprised if one day your primary care provider writes, "30 minutes of drumming daily" on a prescription pad. Until then, consider the rich musical ecosystem right here at CWV. Join the CWV Choir, sign up for Drum classes at the Fitness Center, or simply pause for the serenity of Jim Munkres' pre-dinner piano performances. For a more contemplative experience, attend Chaplain Lisa's Taizé group, where sacred chants linger long after the last note.



CWV is alive with sound—hymns, harmonies, and a few bold modern melodies. All you have to do is listen. And if you feel compelled to sway or hum along, well, that's the body's way of saying thank you.

<https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/sound-music>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/keep-your-brain-young-with-music>

Heart-2-Heart Volunteering

If you are looking for a meaningful, fulfilling way to contribute to the lives of others in our community, please consider joining our wonderful group of Heart-2-Heart volunteers. They visit with people in the Nursing Center and often develop new and lasting friendships. If you are interested, please contact Marcia Feldman in the clinic or Chaplain Alexx Wood.