



January 2024 News and Notes

The Many Benefits of Music for Mind, Body & Spirit

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

In his article, “Why Is Music Good for the Brain,”¹ Andrew E. Budson, MD, notes that music activates “just about all of the brain,” and “keeps your brain networks strong. . . including those networks that are involved in well-being, learning, cognitive function, quality of life, and happiness.” Referencing a 2020 survey conducted by AARP, Dr. Budson summarized the findings:

- Music listeners had higher scores for mental well-being and slightly reduced levels of anxiety and depression compared to people overall.
- Of survey respondents who currently go to musical performances, 69% rated their brain health as “excellent” or “very good,” compared to 58% for those who went in the past and 52% for those who never attended.
- Of those who reported often being exposed to music as a child, 68% rated their ability to learn new things as “excellent” or “very good,” compared to 50% of those who were not exposed to music.
- Active musical engagement, including those over age 50, was associated with higher rates of happiness and good cognitive function.
- Adults with no early music exposure but who currently engage in some music appreciation show above average mental well-being scores.



Similarly Kendra Cherry, MEd,² described the psychological effects of music as “powerful and wide-ranging.” She identifies 10 areas of life that music and music therapy can benefit: enhanced cognitive performance; reduced stress; eating less; improved memory; pain management; better sleep; increased motivation; increased endurance; and improved mood.

“The Impact of Music Therapy on Mental Health”

Music therapist Molly Warren, MM, LPMT, MT-BC³, has seen the benefits of music therapy “for various mental health conditions, including depression, trauma, and schizophrenia (to name a few). Working in a variety of settings with both children and adults, some experiencing trauma, grief, and more, Warren has found that “despite feeling lost or broken, music provided them with the opportunity for expression, and for experiencing safety, peace and comfort.”

She gave one meaningful example: “When I worked at a residential treatment center, I was notified that a child refused to continue meeting with his usual therapist. Even though he was initially hesitant to meet with me, he soon became excited for our music therapy sessions.

“In our first session, we decided to look at the lyrics of ‘Carry On’ by FUN. I asked him to explain what it means to be a ‘shining star,’ which is mentioned several times in the song. I was expecting this 8-year-old to tell me something simple, like “it means you’re special.” But he surprised me when he stated, matter-of-factly: “It means that you are something others notice. It means you are something to look up to, and you are something that helps others navigate.



“And just like that: This lyric offered the opportunity to discuss self-worth, resilience, and strength. Music provided him with the structure and opportunity to process in an engaging way. Soon, his therapist began attending our sessions to help build a healthier therapeutic relationship. His family and teachers reported improved emotion regulation and social interaction skills.”

From casual enjoyment to applied therapy, music has many beneficial roles to play. A reminder from the writers at Webmd⁴: “Music is a powerful tool for mood regulation and stress. The best part is, it’s always available to anyone who needs it.”

Happy New Year!

¹<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/why-is-music-good-for-the-brain-2020100721062>

²<https://www.verywellmind.com/surprising-psychological-benefits-of-music-4126866>

³<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/December-2016/The-Impact-Of-Music-Therapy-on-Mental-Health>

⁴<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/how-music-affects-mental-health>