



*Cutting-edge
research reveals
how music can
help you ease pain,
think smarter,
feel energized,
and fight disease*

SONIC HEALTH boost

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BY JORDAN LITE ■ PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAN SAELINGER

After years of drifting from one ineffective treatment to another, Andrea Bowen is rhapsodic about the one that finally relieved her chronic back problems: music therapy.

“It was a godsend,” says Bowen, 55, of Weld, ME. “Music helped me relax through the pain. It was really the beginning of a new life for me.”

As Bowen learned, music offers more than mere entertainment. Exciting new research is showing that good melody makes good medicine—dulling pain, reducing stress, lowering blood pressure, boosting mood, and curing insomnia. Today, certified music therapists treat heart disease, asthma, Alzheimer’s, and more (to find one near you, call the American Music Therapy Association at 301-589-3300). But you don’t need to study music theory to reap the benefits. Here’s how to find harmony between your physical and mental health.

“HOW MUSIC IS MENDING ME”

Christine Horn 58, NEW YORK CITY

■ **Diagnosis** Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and emphysema

■ **Rx** Music therapists at Beth Israel Medical Center’s Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine prescribed singing and recorder playing. “I was skeptical and intimidated,” says Horn. “I could hardly talk.” But now, when Horn plays the instrument, “I relax and feel my breathing slow down. I can play ‘Blue Moon’ and sing it, too.”

■ **Musical Mechanism** Singing or playing wind instruments increases breathing capacity, say music therapists.

In pain? Try music plus guided imagery

Simply listening to music for 1 hour a day can ease your pain by 20%, Cleveland Clinic researchers recently found. It can even reduce the need for pain medication before and after surgery. Music seems to stimulate the release of pain-masking endorphins in the brain, says Cheryl Dileo, a music therapy professor and director of the Arts and Quality of Life Research Center at Temple University. Music can also amplify the effects of a visualization exercise called guided imagery, in which patients focus on a specific image or sensation that evokes the emotions they want to feel, says Ronit Azoulay, a music therapist at the Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

■ **Sound Advice** To stage your own music-guided imagery session at home, find a comfy chair in a quiet place to sit with your eyes closed and feet up, suggests Joke Brandt, PhD, assistant director of the Arts and Quality of Life Research Center at Temple. If pain is limiting your mobility, select music that makes you feel energetic; if it’s interfering with your sleep, choose tunes that make you feel relaxed.

Next, think of your favorite place or a calming image, such as a quiet stream or deserted beach, says Brandt. “Focus on your breathing and the sensations in your body. Imagine each of your senses reacting to this favorite place or image—the smells, the sounds, the sights. When these thoughts wander,



focus on the music.” Once the song stops, don’t jump up—sit and relax for another minute or two. Repeat daily.

Sleepless? **Get in tune with your brain waves**

Insomniacs who listened to classical piano created in response to their own brain waves—a technique called Brain Music Therapy—improved their sleep quality in 4 weeks, found a University of Toronto study. The cutting-edge therapy boosts levels of melatonin, a brain chemical linked to sleep.

■ **Sound Advice** For \$550, you can get your own BMT CD to use at home. It’s quick and easy: While you’re in a relaxed state, doctors monitor and record your brain waves and then use a computer program to create unique, sleep-inducing piano passages using your own measurements (log on to brainmusicreatment.com for loca-

tions). Listen to your 12-minute loop at bedtime with headphones to drift off into dreamland. “Feeding your brain its own rhythms helps your muscles and breathing relax,” says Galina Mindlin, MD, PhD, a supervising attending and assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at St. Luke’s–Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City.

An easier method: Make music part of your sleep ritual, says Phil Eichling, MD, of the Sleep Disorders Center at the University of Arizona. Any music you associate with relaxation can help. Want to try something new? Eichling’s personal favorites are the Somna sleep-promoting CDs (somna.com), which were developed by a sleep researcher, and albums by flutist R. Carlos Nakai (canyonrecords.com). If possible, use a CD player with a timer so the music shuts off soon after you’ve fallen asleep.

Got the blues?

Listen to upbeat songs while you walk

Listening to music can ease depression symptoms by up to 25%, Cleveland Clinic senior nurse-researcher Sandra Siedlecki, PhD, recently found. The benefits are physical, too: Focusing on New Age music reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, according to a recent French study, and research at the University of California, San Diego, revealed that listening to classical music lowered the blood pressure of college students. A Japanese study concluded that your favorite workout tunes can ward off fatigue during exercise (another proven mood-lifter). This has convinced some experts that combining music and exercise is one of the best bulwarks against depression.

"HOW MUSIC IS MENDING ME"

Woody Geist 82, ROCHESTER, MI

■ **Diagnosis** Middle-stage Alzheimer's
 ■ **Rx** Geist sings nearly every day, both on his own and in groups. Music "helps him to connect," says his wife, Rosemary, 79. "It's strange because he can't tell you where things are or what he just did, but he can sing. It gives us a springboard to talk about happy times."

■ **Musical Mechanism** Listening to favorite types of music helps Alzheimer's patients recall names, faces, and words, according to a study by Concetta Tomaino, executive director of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function in New York City. The melodies spur memories and help patients rediscover their personality, she says.



■ **Sound Advice** When trying to cheer up, resist the temptation to wallow in sad songs and choose up-tempo tunes instead, Dileo suggests. Listening for just 10 to 20 minutes undisturbed can boost your mood.

Upbeat tunes can also energize you during a workout. Aim for at least 30 minutes of cardio, such as brisk walking, running, or biking, 5 days a week, as that amount can help reduce depression. Make sure the music and exercise rhythms are in sync. For a power workout, try the thunderous album *Sai-so: The Remix Project* by the Japanese drum group Kodo, recommends Nancy Bутtenheim, director of Kripalu DansKinetics Teacher Trainings in Stockbridge, MA. For a gentler workout like tai chi, sample a compilation by the Shanghai Chinese Traditional Orchestra. All are sold at amazon.com and other retailers. ■