



Music and Well Being

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You know the moment. You are caught in a terrible snarl of traffic and you realize it will make you late for your next meeting. The sky has just opened up, pelting your car with rain and you remember that you've forgotten to get those new wiper blades, so it is going to be really hard to see. As you sit and stew, you remember you were supposed to pick up some milk for the house and you've forgotten that too. Your jaw is tense, your back is starting to hurt and the whole world feels just plain awful.

And then it happens.

You turn on the radio. And there it is. That song. The song. The one that you listened to during that heavenly summer a few years ago when all the world was glowing with sun and ease and possibility. Suddenly, you start singing along, then swaying along and before you know it.....

You are out of your funk.

Moments like these illustrate two of the most powerful things music can do for us: alleviate stress and lift our moods.

“Music can change the world because it can change people “ says Bono, the famous U2 front man. In fact the power of music to heal and help us goes back a long way and exists in every culture. In ancient mythology, Apollo was both the God of music and of healing. And centuries ago, both Aristotle and Plato wrote of the power of music to heal.

Music affects us in so many ways – it can inspire, galvanize and soothe us. It can trigger creativity and improve our sleep. The release of endorphins in our system when we listen to music strengthens learning, improves memory and can even raise our IQ and promote brain health.

And of course, we all know how music gets us going when we exercise. There is nothing like hearing a favorite song with a great beat to get us up and moving. Much is known and more is being learned about why this is true. Dr. Costas Karageorghis, a sports psychologist based in London, specializes in the powerful connection between music and exercise. His research has shown that there are four important ways that music inspires people to move: rhythm, musicality, cultural impact and association. A great example of this is experienced in Zumba classes where the beat, the soaring melodies and the cultural associations with Latin music all create a powerful force that keeps people dancing. In fact, when Zumba instructors are being trained, they are told that music makes of 70% of the power of the class.

Many hospitals are now offering music therapy to their patients. This can often be something as simple as a strolling guitarist who moves in and out of patients rooms. In Chinese medical theory, our five internal organs are believed to have corresponding musical tones, and these tones are used to encourage healing. If you have ever had your acupuncturist turn on music during your session, there is probably more happening than mere accompaniment.

The incredible power of music to help and heal reaches people of all ages. It has been proven to bring joy to people with dementia and help them stay better connected to their caregivers and to the world around them. Even animals have been shown to respond to music in similar ways to people. Elephants have been known to move in dance-like ways when music is played to them and a growing number of Veterinarians, pet owners and kennel keepers are confirming that dogs can be soothed and often energized by music.

For a complete emotional uplift, you certainly can't beat the power of experiencing music played live. And perhaps the ultimate expression of how music can benefit your life is to take up an instrument. At any age, it is possible to learn an instrument and studies have shown that people who play music have improved thinking abilities and improved memory. Consider it! It is never too late to begin a musical journey that is all your own.

