

# Music and well-being

Associate Professor Louis Roller  
Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences  
Monash University

*“If **music** be the food of love, play on; Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, The appetite may sicken, and so die. That strain again! it had a dying fall: O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound That breathes upon a bank of violets, Stealing and giving odour.”*

Twelfth Night William Shakespeare

The study of '**music and emotion**' seeks to understand the psychological relationship between human affect and music.

It is a branch of music psychology with numerous areas of study, including the nature of emotional reactions to music, how characteristics of the listener may determine which emotions are felt, and which components of a musical composition or performance may elicit certain reactions.

The field draws upon and has significant implications for such areas as philosophy, musicology, music therapy, music theory and aesthetics, as well the acts of musical composition and performance.

## Music and health

Isn't it interesting how hearing a particular song can bring back a special memory or make you feel happy or calm or pumped up? People are born with the ability to tell the difference between music and noise.

Our brains actually have different pathways for processing different parts of music including pitch, melody, rhythm, and tempo. And, fast music can actually increase your heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure, while slower music tends to have the opposite effect.

While the effects of music on people are not fully understood, studies have shown that when you hear music to your liking, the brain actually releases *dopamine* that has positive effects on mood.

Music can make us feel strong emotions, such as joy, sadness, or fear—some will agree that it has the power to move us.

According to some researchers, music may even have the power to improve our health and well-being.

**Culture in music cognition** refers to the impact that a person's culture has on their music cognition, including their preferences, emotion recognition, and musical memory. Musical preferences are biased toward culturally familiar musical traditions beginning in infancy, and adults' classification of the emotion of a musical piece depends on both culturally specific and universal structural features. Additionally, individuals' musical memory abilities are greater for culturally familiar music than for culturally unfamiliar music. The sum of these effects makes culture a powerful influence in music cognition.

Though more studies are needed to confirm the potential health benefits of music, some studies suggest that listening to music can have a number of positive effects on health.

**1. Improves mood.** Studies show that listening to music can benefit overall well-being, help regulate emotions, and create happiness and relaxation in everyday life.

**2. Reduces stress.** Listening to 'relaxing' music (generally considered to have slow tempo, low pitch, and no lyrics) has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety in healthy people and in people undergoing medical procedures (e.g., surgery, dental, colonoscopy).

**3. Lessens anxiety.** In studies of people with cancer, listening to music combined with standard care reduced anxiety compared to those who received standard care alone.

**4. Improves exercise.** Studies suggest that music can enhance aerobic exercise, boost mental and physical stimulation, and increase overall performance.

**5. Improves memory.** Research has shown that the repetitive elements of rhythm and melody help our brains form patterns that enhance memory. In a study of stroke survivors, listening to music helped them experience more verbal memory, less confusion, and better focused attention.

**6. Eases pain.** In studies of patients recovering from surgery, those who listened to music before, during, or after surgery had less pain and more overall satisfaction compared with patients who did not listen to music as part of their care.

**7. Provides comfort.** Music therapy has also been used to help enhance communication, coping, and expression of feelings such as fear, loneliness, and anger in patients who have a serious illness, and who are in end-of-life care.

**8. Improves cognition.** Listening to music can also help people with Alzheimer's recall seemingly lost memories and even help maintain some mental abilities.

**9. Helps children with autism spectrum disorder.** Studies of children with autism spectrum disorder who received music therapy showed improvement in social responses, communication skills, and attention skills.

**10. Soothes premature babies.** Live music and lullabies may impact vital signs, improve feeding behaviours and sucking patterns in premature infants, and may increase prolonged periods of quiet-alert states.

### **Singing:**

1. the activity of performing songs or tunes by making musical sounds with the voice. "the singing of hymns in Latin"

2. melodious whistling and twittering sounds made by a bird or birds. "the cries of laughter from children are a pleasant counterpoint to the singing of blackbirds"

A **lullaby**, or cradle song, is a soothing song or piece of music that is usually played for (or sung to) children. The purposes of **lullabies** vary. In some societies they are used to pass down cultural knowledge or tradition. Singing "hush little baby, don't say a word" can actually help babies relax and sleep. ... By recreating this womb experience through song, parents can comfort and soothe the baby off to sleep. However, modern research methods have found that lullabies do much more than help a baby sleep. Archaeological evidence suggests that parents have used lullabies to soothe their young for **at least 4,000 years**.

