Music Therapy Selected Research Bibliography for Older Adults


“Active music-making provides a form of therapy for the Alzheimer’s patient which may stimulate cognitive activities such that areas subject to progressive failure are maintained.”


Using Music Therapeutically with Older Adults: Music provides physical and emotional stimulation, facilitates social integration, provides communication, provides emotional expression, evokes associations, and provides diversion from inactivity, discomfort, and daily routine. Development of musical skills in healthy older adults may facilitate social integration, self-expression, structuring of time, and intellectual stimulation. Music is effective as a therapeutic medium because it is flexible, structured, occurs through time, and is an aesthetic experience.


Participation in organized music activities improves social interaction, well-being and a sense of accomplishment among community-dwelling senior adults.


“Findings of this study suggest that vocal instruction, inclusive of breathing exercises, may help to improve the quality of life for senior citizens with emphysema.”
   Aging affects explicit but not implicit memory for melodic material.

   A significant reduction in agitation was found during and following individualized music as compared to classical music.

   Movement sequences set to music composed to reflect the dynamics, rhythm, timing, and phrasing of the movements showed statistically significant increases in measures of one-foot stance balance, gait speed, and functional reach.


   Positive affects and verbal responses were observed while performing upper extremity exercises with both music and karaoke accompaniment music.

   Background music resulted in the significant reduction of accidents/incidents, PRN medication, STAT orders by physicians, and unplanned staff absences. Both music therapy sessions and Somatron sessions resulted in decreased agitation behaviors.

   “It is suggested that personal preference is an influential factor when considering the efficacy of music listening for pain relief.”

“Using language and music together therapeutically with brain-impaired patients offers a greater chance of activating intact neurological pathways than using language alone. Music therapy also offers an alternate and creative way of communicating with these patients.”


“Findings from clinical research suggesting that music may facilitate a reduction in the stress response include decreased anxiety levels, decreased blood pressure and heart rate, and changes in plasma stress hormone levels...Music therapy may be useful in a wide range of clinical settings with patients experiencing health problems as diverse as hypertension/cardiovascular disease, migraine headaches, and gastrointestinal ulcers.”


“Satisfaction with music accounted for the most variance in exercise enjoyment, followed by satisfaction with the instructor, and finally salience of exercise role identity.”