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Could you benefit from music therapy?

When you listen to music it can influence your mood – putting on the right tune can perhaps even turn a bad day into a good one. Music therapy is the clinical practice that uses the power of music to help you explore your innermost thoughts and feelings. Not only can this treatment help people struggling with mental well-being – it has been shown to positively affect people with physical illnesses, disabilities, and a wide range of long-term conditions.

What is music therapy?

Ancient civilisations recognised the power of music to heal, prescribing it as medicine for all kinds of illnesses and disease. These days, music therapy is an established clinical practice with the potential to improve the well-being of almost anyone in need.

Music has the ability to lift our mood and to energise us or relax our minds, depending on the pace and melody. This makes music therapy a great option for people with [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and other mental health disorders.

Yet, music's potential for healing doesn't stop there. If your life has been affected by a physical health problem – whether this be illness, injury, or disability – or by particular social needs that make life challenging, then music therapy could make a difference in your life too.

Types of music therapy

Music therapy isn't as straightforward as finding and listening to a fast-paced, happy-sounding song. Rather, an accredited professional called a music [therapist](#) has special methods to help people achieve certain goals. This may involve creating personalised treatment plans.

Here are some popular music therapy techniques:

Nordoff–Robbins music therapy

What: improvising a tune on an instrument – usually something that's easy to play, like a drum or cymbal – while your therapist plays another instrument.

Why: improvisation encourages self-expression, which in turn can be a healthy outlet for feelings that are otherwise hard to communicate.

Cognitive behavioural music therapy (CBMT)

What: [cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\)](#), a type of talking therapy, is combined with listening to music, singing, or playing an instrument in a structured manner.

Why: adding music to CBT can help to reinforce what you discuss with your therapist, such as new positive ways of thinking and behaviours.

Vocal psychotherapy

What: creating different sounds through various vocal exercises and breathing techniques.

Why: to stimulate emotions and help you connect with feelings you may not have known you had.

Analytical music therapy

What: using improvisation to sing or play an instrument.

Why: to help you express any unconscious thoughts that need addressing with your music therapist.

Benenzon music therapy

What: your therapist finds sounds that best match your psychological state and emotions.

Why: by creating your musical sound identity, your therapist helps you connect with these emotions so you can both analyse them and begin to heal.

Community music therapy

What: community music therapy sessions where you engage in music as part of a group, rather than in a one-on-one session with a therapist.

Why: singing or dancing as part of a group can uplift your mood further by forming bonds between you and the other members – particularly helpful for those [who feel isolated or lonely](#).

Willingness, not talent

There are so many different ways to create, listen to, or use music. Many music therapy sessions require you to be an active and creative participant – you might write a song, play an instrument, dance, or sing. This isn't about having musical ability or skill, but about opening yourself up to the influence of music.

It's not always going to be easy, but stepping outside your comfort zone is important in **all forms of therapy**. By trying your best, you may be surprised at just how quickly you can free yourself from embarrassment or self-consciousness.

Benefits of music therapy for everyone

Everyone has the ability to respond positively to music. You may unwind after a hard day's work by listening to classical radio in the car, or feel uplifted and energised by a DJ set on a night out.

But does music therapy as a certified practice have a place in everyone's lives? Experts say yes, if you would like to try music therapy and have a particular goal, you're welcome to sign up for sessions.

General benefits of music therapy include:

- **General calmness** – research has shown that is effective for [stress relief](#) because it lowers cortisol, a stress hormone¹.
- **Your happiness** – it can release endorphins and dopamine, two hormones associated with pleasure².
- **Improved self-esteem** – it's a form of self-expression that allows you to focus on yourself. This is a form of [self-care](#) that has been found to boost self-esteem.

- **Managing your blood pressure and heart rate** – it's a safe and non-medicinal way to reduce [high blood pressure](#) and a high heart rate³.

There is no age limit for music therapy. Many children, teenagers, adults, and elderly people have reaped the rewards of this versatile and enjoyable well-being tool.

What conditions can music therapy treat?

There's plenty of strong evidence that music therapy can help people manage a wide range of health conditions and problems – including mental disorders, physical illnesses, disabilities, injuries, and long-term diseases.

The list of conditions that music therapy can help is long, but includes⁴:

- [Childbirth-related problems.](#)
- [Post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\).](#)
- [Headache.](#)
- [Diabetes.](#)
- [Injury rehabilitation.](#)
- [Insomnia.](#)
- [Traumatic brain injury \(.](#)
- [Obsessive-compulsive disorder \(OCD\).](#)
- [Stroke.](#)
- [Schizophrenia.](#)
- [Alzheimer's disease.](#)
- [Learning disabilities.](#)
- [Respiratory problems.](#)
- [Conditions affecting communication.](#)

Common conditions that music therapy is used for

Let's take a closer look at how this type of therapy can make a positive difference in these people's lives.

Children with autism

There is a growing feeling that music therapy can improve the lives of [children with autism](#). According to the [National Autistic Society](#), following therapy many children have shown improvements in their: ability to communicate, cognitive development, social skills, propensity for self-expression, sense of empowerment, and creative abilities⁵.

People with depression and anxiety

Music can reduce our stress hormones¹ and boost our happy hormones². Research has shown that this can make music therapy an effective, non-medicinal treatment for both depression and anxiety. It's most effective when combines with usual treatments, such as psychotherapy or [antidepressant drugs](#)⁶.

People in pain

Music also has the power to help people cope with physical pain. For example, many women have reported that music therapy-assisted childbirth helped them cope with the physical pain of labour⁷, and the same results have been noted for people with surgical or injury-induced pain⁸. For those managing long-term pain conditions, music therapy may help people to focus on positive pain-free memories when their symptoms get bad.

The visually impaired

Music can help the blind or those with limited sight express themselves and communicate with the world. Often, children with visual impairment can find communication difficult, but learning to play music or to sing can be a creative outlet that can help improve any emotional or social problems related to their disability. The intervention of music in forms of movement can even improve their motor skills⁹.

People living with cancer

For people [living with cancer](#), it's thought that music therapy can be useful at every stage of their journey. Through diagnosis and treatments like [radiotherapy](#) and [chemotherapy](#), it can provide some much-needed relief for feelings of anxiety and depression. It may even help people cope with the unpleasant side-effects of chemotherapy, such as nausea¹⁰.

Where to find a music therapist

You can find music therapists in private practices across the UK, as well as in some community health centres, rehabilitation facilities, and hospitals. [Nordoff-Robins](#), one of the main music therapy providers in the UK, have an [online self-referral form](#) to help you find your nearest centre.

Further reading

1. [De Witte et al: Music therapy for stress reduction: a systematic review and meta-analysis.](#)
2. [Incadence: The science behind the sound \(music therapy and our brains\).](#)
3. [Lorber and Divjak: Music therapy as an intervention to reduce blood pressure and anxiety levels in older adults with hypertension.](#)
4. [American Music Therapy Association: Music therapy with specific populations: fact Sheets, resources & bibliographies.](#)
5. [National Autistic Society: Music therapy and autism.](#)
6. [Aalbers et al: Music therapy for depression.](#)
7. [McCaffrey et al: The role and outcomes of music listening for women in childbirth: an integrative review.](#)
8. [Redding et al: "Where's the Music?" using music therapy for pain management.](#)
9. [Cylulko: Typhlo music therapy interventions supporting the motor development of a child with visual disability.](#)
10. [Rossetti et al: The impact of music therapy on anxiety in cancer patients undergoing simulation for radiation therapy.](#)

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