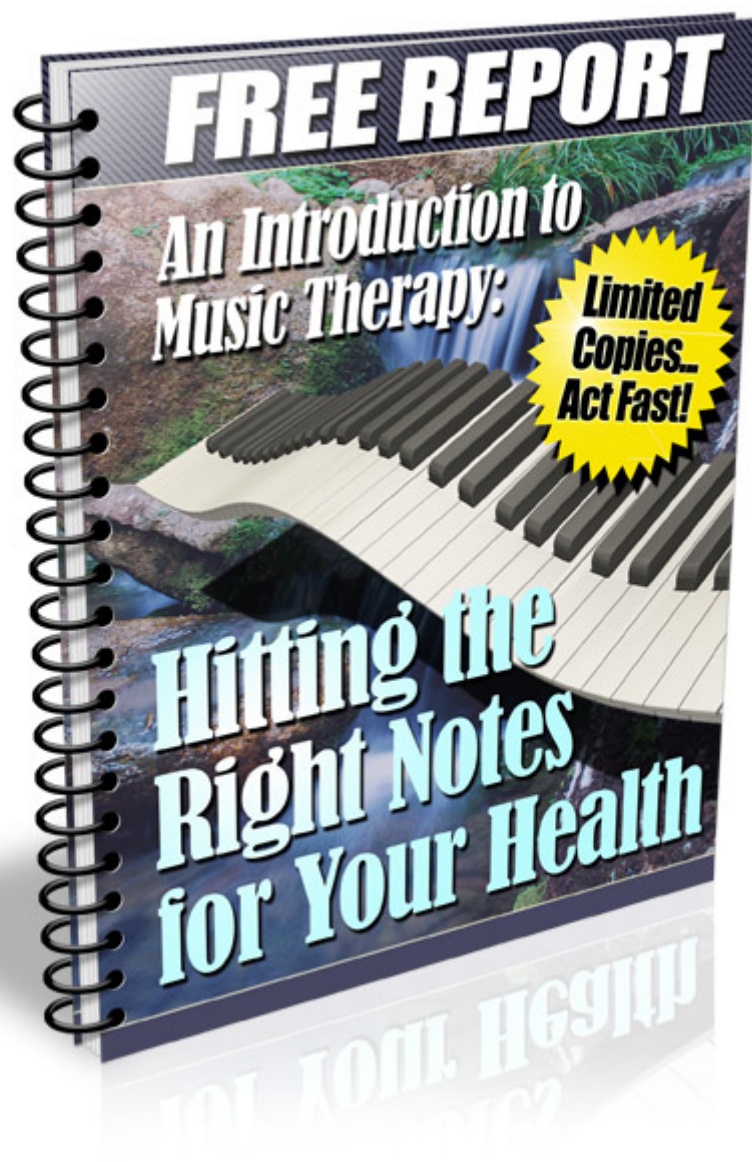


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**An Introduction to  
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**Hitting the  
Right Notes  
for Your Health**



# AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC THERAPY: HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES FOR YOUR HEALTH

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# INTRODUCTION

Everyone has different tastes in music. For some, there's nothing more soothing than a classical piano solo; for others, the thrashing guitars of heavy metal are what increase their energy and their concentration.

Music allows us to focus our attention not only on the rhythm and the notes being played, but also on the lyrics and the emotion with which the song is played.

In doing so, we can work our way through troubles or simply push our minds out of a low mood.

But can music be therapy?

So often you hear that music is used to encourage shopping or to soothe anxiety, but can music be used in a more clinical and controlled setting? In the field of alternative medicine, all types of therapies are being discovered and used.

Music therapy is just one of a number of expressive therapies that are used to help guide a client from pain and suffering to happiness.

In utilizing this everyday part of our lives, we can begin to change the way our brains think and thus the way our brains affect and control the rest of our bodies.

This can have positive effects on our physical health and any issues we may be facing right now.

Want to hear more?

## WHAT IS MUSIC THERAPY?

Defining music therapy is a little trickier than it might seem. While the obvious tool of the practice is music, there are a number of ways that music can be used to help a particular client.

According to the American Music Therapy Association, music therapy is a therapy in which goals are set for the client and music is used to achieve these goals.

The actual process for the therapy can vary from client to client, depending on their needs and the severity of their problems.

The therapy needs to be administered by a licensed and trained professional in a clinical setting, but can also be used outside of the office with the guidance of the therapist.

There are a number of areas that music therapy can help to develop:

- Self awareness
- Cognitive development
- Social skills
- Motor skills
- Physical rehabilitation
- Spiritual awareness

Music therapy works along with traditional therapies as well to increase the ability of the patient to solve their internal and external struggles.

Some more traditional therapists will also employ music therapy techniques when it seems as though the client will respond to this type of communication more favorably than in talk therapy.

Music therapy can be the go-between in the conversation between a therapist and the client.

Instead of placing all of the emphasis on the thoughts of the client, the music can speak for them or it can simply allow them to feel more at ease with talking about their feelings with their therapist.

Music therapy is appropriate for all ages, making it an ideal therapy for nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and day care centers and rehabilitative facilities.

# WHAT MUSIC DOES TO THE BRAIN

Each sound has its own specific wavelength when it enters the air. Each of these wavelengths helps the ear to decipher the sounds and then to translate them within the brain.

As this process takes place, the brain is slightly altered in relation to its activity and the actions that take place as a result in the body.

Studies have shown, for example, that when classical music enters the ear, the client tends to become calmer and more relaxed. Their brain function slows and this translates into less anxiety for the patient and more concentration.

One of the first ways the music affects the brain is in the memory portions of your brain. When you hear a specific sound or song, your brain creates an imprint of this song in your mind in relation to the emotions you were feeling when you first heard it.

This is why you can be taken back to a certain memory by a song you hear on the radio.

In order to access these positive feelings again and again, you might want to listen to the music until it becomes a part of your everyday experience. Conversely, if there is a song that has negative emotions connected with it, you may want to listen to the song and try to change your feelings about it – or avoid it altogether to make the imprint less sharp in your brain.

Music also helps the memory recall and recognize certain sounds.

In advertising, for example, you will probably remember a catchy tune more than you will remember a dull tune. By creating a unique tune, advertisers know that you will keep that in mind along with the information the tune relayed.

Music affects the brain by changing the way it interprets different sounds, in relation to emotions and even health conditions. When you connect musical choices to certain things, your brain will go back to that state whenever the music reemerges in your life.

And that fact can be used in the therapeutic setting.

# THE BENEFITS OF MUSIC THERAPY

When you're considering music therapy as a way to heal either you or someone you love, it helps to understand what you might get out of this therapeutic process.

While music therapy is not a cure all, it certainly will improve the quality of life for most clients.

Music therapy:

- Helps improve the immune system response
- Enhances concentration
- Improves motor skills
- Helps in physical rehabilitation
- Can increase social skills and interaction
- Helps to alleviate pain
- Allows the client the chance to share their feelings
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Can lessen hyperactivity
- Does not have any adverse side effects
- Does not interact with other treatments
- Can be used in conjunction with other treatments and therapies

But what's really interesting about the effects of music on a client is that it can also harm the patient.

When a negative association to a sound or a song shows up in a therapy session, the patient's brain can react in a negative way – even if they don't feel it.

If this negative effect continues over time, the brain can become altered and begin to send out negative signals to the rest of the body, resulting in sickness.

This is why it's so important to find a qualified and experienced music therapist when you are considering this form of treatment for you or for someone else in your family.

# TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF MUSIC THERAPY

Since there are hundreds of ways you might be able to interpret music, it's no surprise that music therapists have a variety of different ways to use music within a session with a client.

Here are just some of the ways that music can be utilized in the therapeutic environment:

- Listening – Sometimes just listening to music together can help a client become more relaxed and will inspire them to talk about things on their mind.
- Active listening – When the client or the therapist bring in a certain song to be listened to during the session, this begins a conversation that interprets the meaning for both people. For example, a therapist might bring in a song about divorce and then talk about the client's reactions to the song in relation to their own experiences with divorce.
- Passive listening – Often, background music is used to help soothe a frazzled patient or population. This is why you find softer and calmer music on the phone when you're on hold or in an elevator.
- Creation – For some clients, actively creating music helps them to access different emotions or memories they want to understand. Or creating music can help a person dealing with an illness forget about the illness for a moment. And you don't have to be good at making music or have any skills at all. Just singing your feelings or banging on a drum works just as well.
- Lyrical therapy – By having a client write a new song about their feelings, often to the tune of a familiar song or a song which has negative connotations for them, the therapist is helping the client transmute their feelings into something positive that they can access and understand.
- Entertainment value – A therapist might play songs that will allow patients with chronic diseases to relax and feel less pain. Those with Alzheimer's, for example, might enjoy listening to songs from their youth in order to feel happy and content.

- Motor skill processing – By playing songs with a strong rhythm, the therapist can help a client work on specific skills and goals they wish to reach.
- Motivational music – Those who are in physical therapy will often have a tough time imitating the movements that the therapist wants them to do. With fast paced music and motivational lyrics, this music therapy can help them push through to the end.
- Artistic responses to music – While listening to music in a session, the therapist might ask the client to draw what they see or feel in relation to the music.

There are numerous ways a music therapist can incorporate music into their practice.

While different people respond to different musical tools, there is certainly something for everyone and for every therapy goal.

## **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT IN A SESSION**

Though it's hard to say exactly what a music therapy session will be like for you, there is a certain format that your therapy will follow.

First of all, you will be assessed to see what the main concerns and goals are for your particular therapy treatment plan. The therapist will ask you a number of questions to see what concerns you have and what your familiarity with music might be.

If you don't already have a diagnosis for your mental troubles or physical troubles, you will want to make sure this is something that you get first in order to further streamline the therapy process – and get it moving in the proper direction.

After the initial assessment, you will probably notice that your therapy session begins with simply talking about the concerns you have at that particular time.

If you have no troubles handling the things you wish to speak of, you might not even delve into a musical technique.



But if your therapist notices you are having troubles talking about or expressing your feelings, you might be asked to:

- Choose a song that expresses your feelings
- Listen to a particular song
- Write out lyrics for a song that expresses your concerns
- Dance around to music to express yourself
- Bang on a drum
- Play with other instruments in the room
- Sing
- Chant
- Etc.

While you might feel funny at first doing any of these things, your musical therapist is simply trying to coax you away from feeling stuck and unable to process your feelings.

This activity can go on for a bit and then you will begin to talk about the experience, what it meant for you, and what you may have learned from the activity.

Some music therapists will also assign homework for their clients, such as choosing a song for the next treatment session or perhaps just that they figure out a treatment technique that they would like to try the next time.

Each visit with a music therapist will probably be different from the one before – and this is a good thing.

The more you stimulate the brain to access potentially dormant parts, the more success you will have in your goals.

## **FINDING THE BEST MUSIC THERAPIST**

What many people don't realize about therapy is that it's not just the techniques and tools that are being used – it's the therapist that uses them.

In the therapy setting, you need to feel safe and comfortable expressing your feelings and ideas about your problems. This will help you to talk more and get more out of each session.

To make sure you get the best therapist possible, you will need to follow these guidelines:

- Look for certification – There are several different types of certifications that a music therapist might have: RMT, MT-BC, CMT, or ACMT. All of these should have been conferred by the local or the state board of music therapy, so ask to see a copy of their certification and then double check it with the American Music Therapy Association and the certification board.
- Ask about experience – While there's nothing wrong with having a newer therapist, if you have serious troubles you need help with, it might be a good idea to work with a therapist who has been practicing for over five years.
- Ask about specialties – Every patient is different, but a music therapist that specializes in the area of your concerns will be the one who will help you the most. Talk briefly about your goals and issues on the phone when making your initial appointment to see if you and your therapist are a good match.
- Ask about tools and techniques – Though it's possible you might never use some of the tools and techniques your therapist uses, it helps to know what you may be asked to do in order to get a sense of your comfort with that.
- Check with your insurance – Many health insurance companies are now covering music therapy either as a whole or a percentage of the payments. By looking into the recommendations of your insurance company, you can increase the odds that your treatments will be paid for.
- Consider the school where the music therapist went – With all of the diploma mills and less than satisfactory schools out there, you need to make sure your music therapist went to one of the better schools before you sign up to work with them. Contact the school to see if they were actually a student to be safe.

Check with your regular therapist as well as friends and family to see if they can recommend anyone for you to see.

# SPECIFIC CONDITIONS THAT MUSIC THERAPY HELPS

With the way music affects the brain, it's no wonder that music therapy is proving to be so helpful in a number of conditions.

From children to the elderly, most everyone can benefit from some form of music therapy – even if it's on their own.

Here are some of the conditions music therapy helps:

- Alzheimer's – In the rapid and degenerative memory loss of these patients, it's easy for them to get frustrated and upset with their lives. By playing music from their youthful years, many patients experience more serenity and are able to maintain their short-term memories.
- ADD/ADHD – By helping the brain have something else to focus on, children and adults with attention deficit issues are often able to focus for longer periods of time. Music has also been linked with helping settle down the patient so that they're not fidgeting or running around in circles when bored.
- Chronic pain – When the brain has something else to focus on, the body can often 'forget' about problems it has. By listening to soothing music, some patients have reported significant pain reduction in the case of injuries, migraines, and cancers.
- Immune system disorders – As the brain is coaxed into a happier state, the immune system is able to produce more white blood cells to fight off infections.
- Special needs students – When a child is having troubles learning, music therapy can help them remain calm and avoid frustration that only perpetuates the idea of having troubles with learning.
- Rett syndrome – This progressive neurological and physical disorder can be slowed by the use of music therapy.

# MUSIC THERAPY – ON YOUR OWN

For most of us, we've already learned how to use music therapy in our lives – without even realizing it.

Here are some ways to use music to heal your own woes:

- Create a CD mix of songs you associate with good times in your relationship – Whenever you are having a fight with your partner or spouse, play this CD to remind you of why you are together. It can help to defuse your feelings and begin a rational discussion about solutions.
- Have soothing music to play in stressful situations – In your car, have classical or New Age music playing during rush hour. At work, have some background music to help you stay calm under pressure.
- Bang on a drum – When you create a rhythm on anything in your physical environment, you can begin to soothe your brain and open up the possibility of higher problem solving skills.
- Use high energy music during workouts – The more inspiring your music, the more energy you will put into your workout and studies have shown that people who use music during their workouts actually workout for longer periods of time.
- Use relaxing or positive music in the background when you're sick – To help support your immune system, make sure you are always listening to uplifting tunes.

## CONCLUSION

The music of your life can be the music of your health too. By taking a few moments to consider the ways music affects you, you will begin to see the value and the importance of music therapy.

While you might not rush out to find a music therapist just yet, knowing that they can help you when you're running out of options is something that can be soothing enough.