

How Sound Affects Us

I. INTRODUCTION

Sound therapy involves using sound waves to heal the body and mind.

Such sounds are not what we traditionally think of as music but usually continuous tones created by drums, gongs or more modern ultrasonic machines.

“Everything in Life is Vibration” – Albert Einstein

The theory behind sound therapy is that all of our bodies’ cells vibrate at a natural frequency. These frequencies can become misaligned or otherwise changed through illness or physical stress.

By subjecting the body, or part of the body, to a sound at a particular frequency such problems can be improved. An example is playing back a recording of a particular sound at a predetermined and constant frequency to treat muscular aches and pains, which may have been caused by stress.

Some people claim that sound therapy works well for them, while others remain more sceptical. Regardless of the effectiveness of sound therapy there is little doubt that music can affect us and can be used effectively to aid relaxation and stress relief.

II. POWER OF MUSIC

It is a well-established fact that music can alter our mood, stir emotions and may even lead us to behave in unusual ways. There are many ways that music can make us feel, including:

Patriotic – National anthems and other music associated with a country or geographic area.

Loyalty – Music and sounds associated with sports events, schools, clubs and other organisations.

Spiritual – Hymns, chants, gospel and other music and sounds associated with religion or the divine.

Nostalgic – Music can remind us of the past, both good times and bad times.

Love – Music can be used to express love and as a sign of affection.

Hate – Music can be used in war and violence and to promote anger.

Energetic – Rhythms in music can make us tap our feet, clap our hands and dance. Music can aid physical exercise.

Happy – Music can lift our mood, make us smile, laugh and sing along.

Sad – Music can make us feel melancholy, gloomy or even depressed. Music can make us cry.

Excited – Music is often used to excite us, like at a funfair or during some tense moment in a movie.

Irritated – Music we don’t like can irritate us, as can an ‘ear-worm’ a tune that gets stuck in your head and is repeated over and over.

Unexplained – Sometimes music can cause more unexplained physical reactions, like the hairs standing up on the back of your neck or goosebumps which are more commonly

associated with strong feelings of nostalgia, pleasure, euphoria, astonishment or awe.

The list above is by no means complete, music and sound affect us in all conceivable ways – even when we are not fully listening or paying attention. It should be clear that music can also, therefore, be used as an effective relaxation technique – a way to reduce stress levels and release tensions.

One problem with using music as a tool for relaxation is that everybody has different tastes. You need to find what works best for you.

Musical styles and genres are so diverse that it may be difficult to find a particular style that best suits you.

Furthermore, different styles may help you to relax at different times and in different ways. A warm, candle-lit bath whilst listening to soft classical music may work sometimes, whereas loud rock music may help you to release pent up tensions through dancing and/or singing along.

It is important, therefore, that you find out what sort of music can help you and in what circumstance. Work on increasing your musical repertoire to find styles, artists, composers and genres that you enjoy listening to.

Listen to different radio stations online or over the air, buy or borrow new music and experiment; you may discover a whole new area of music that appeals to you.

Personal Music Therapy

Relaxation with music does not necessarily mean sitting or lying still whilst listening, although this can be particularly relaxing.

Enjoying the therapeutic benefits of music can be achieved in much more active situations, during sport, at work, while you cook, while gardening – with modern technology such as MP3 players and smart-phones music has become truly portable and customisable it can be enjoyed anywhere.

By actively listening to music – this means consciously listening, not just hearing music – you occupy your brain and distract it from other thoughts.

If you are stressed about something then it is likely that your problems, worries and concerns occupy a lot of your brain time making you tired and irritable – classic symptoms of stress. Music can offer a healthy and low-cost escape, lifting your mood and maybe even making you smile.

III. SOME WAYS TO ENJOY MUSIC

Fully relaxing – try using the basic relaxation technique outlined on our Relaxation Techniques main page. Use headphones or noise reducing in-ear buds to listen to some soothing music. Set the volume at a comfortable level for you, neither too loud nor too quiet. Relax and concentrate on listening to the music.

Overcoming a fear – a good example of this is on an aeroplane. Many people have certain anxieties about flying, especially during take-off and landing. Use your headphones or ear-buds and close your eyes or use an eye mask – choose some soothing music to help you overcome your fear. Remember your

fellow passengers, the noise of the plane may cancel out a lot of your music but being able to hear somebody else's headphones can be very annoying.

Overcoming frustration – being stuck in traffic, especially if you are running late for work or another appointment is, as you will know if it has ever happened to you, very frustrating. Try putting some of your favourite music on in the car (when appropriate) – turn the volume up and sing or hum along. This can be a great way to alleviate the stress of such situations.

While you exercise – exercise itself is a good stress reliever and can help your mind relax – your endorphin (anti-stress hormone) levels increase while your cortisol (stress hormone) levels decrease. Exercising to music can help take your mind away from the fact you are exercising, especially if you find it boring or physically hard, so you actually get a better workout. If you have ever been to the gym you will notice how most people exercise to music. Pick music with a beat that matches the rhythm of your exercise, if you concentrate on the music your body will slip into a rhythm and you will achieve your goals more easily.

Whenever is appropriate – try listening to your music more frequently, whenever you can and is appropriate to your surroundings.

IV. VOCAL TONING

Vocal toning is a method of using your voice to help create inner calm and reduce stress.

Vocal toning is not singing and therefore your ability to sing or whether or not you consider yourself 'tone-deaf' is not relevant.

Toning is based on the idea that we have many pent-up emotions and frustrations. We are taught, from an early age, to be quiet in most day-to-day situations, making loud noises is discouraged or seen as a sign of anger or aggression.

Toning provides a way of freeing suppressed feelings and emotions through the release of sound, encouraging us to make random loud noises and sounds.

Try some vocal toning to see if it works for you.

Make long, draw out, loud noises: shouts, grunts, screeches, hums. Don't worry about what you sound like, just make the noises that feel right to you. As with laughter therapy, vocal toning can help reduce adrenaline and cortisol the main hormones associated with stress.