

# Music in Harmony with Healing



Assoc. Prof. Gordon S. Lynch

Before you reach for the painkillers, give your MP3 player or personal stereo a go. Music has been shown to help people manage chronic pain and associated depression.

People suffering from chronic pain are often afflicted by depression, disability and feelings of powerlessness. Chronic pain refers to pain that persists in spite of medication and other treatments. Patients with back, neck and joint pain report the highest levels of pain, depression and disability. In many cases, a fear of pain can lead to avoidance of family, social, recreational, and employment activities.

The usual approach to pain management is use of medications such as anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxants, and anti-depressants, but these can often have side effects. Listening to music is another approach that researchers have found effective for reducing pain and anxiety. Previous research has shown that listening to 45 minutes of soft music before bedtime can improve sleep by more than a third (Lai & Good 2005).

In a recent study, nursing researchers Dr. Sandra Siedliecki from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Prof. Marion Good, from Case Western Reserve University examined whether music could affect power, pain, depression, and disability in working age adults with chronic pain.

Their trial involved 60 participants who had had been suffering from a range of painful conditions, including osteoarthritis, disc problems and rheumatoid arthritis, for an average of six and a half years. They ranged in age from 21 to 65, with an average age of 50. The participants were assigned into one of two music groups or a control group.

The first group were able to choose their own favourite music which included everything from pop and rock to slow and melodious tunes and nature sounds that are often used to promote sleep or relaxation. The second group chose from five relaxing tapes, selected by the researchers and featuring piano, jazz, orchestra, harp and synthesizer. These tapes had been used in previous pain studies by Prof. Good.

The people who took part in the music groups listened to music on a headset for an hour a day. Everyone who took part, including the control group, kept a pain diary. They completed questionnaires about the type of pain they were experiencing, their feelings of depression, their level of disability, and feelings of power or powerlessness.

## Beating pain

The results, published in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, found that people who listened to music for an hour every day for a week reported improved physical and psychological symptoms compared to the control group.

They had more power and less pain, depression and disability than the control group. Interestingly, there were no differences between the two music groups.

The music groups reported that their pain had fallen by between 12 and 21 per cent, when measured by two different pain measurement scales. The control group reported that pain increased by between one and two per cent. People in the music groups also reported 19 to 25 per cent less depression than the control group.

The music groups reported feeling nine to 18 per cent less disabled than those who hadn't listened to music and said they had between five and eight per cent more power over their pain than the control group.

The researchers concluded that patients could be taught how to use music to enhance the effects of analgesics, decrease pain, depression and disability, and promote feelings of power.

"Listening to music has already been shown to promote a number of positive benefits and this research adds to the growing body of evidence that it has an important role to play in modern healthcare" Prof. Good said.

### References:

Lai HL, Good M (2005) Music improves sleep quality in older adults. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 49: 234-244.

Siedliecki SL, Good M (2006) Effect of music on power, pain, depression and disability. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 54: 553-562.

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