

Music demonstrated to alleviate cancer patients' symptoms

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Credit: Drexel University

We've all heard of laughter being the best medicine, but what about music?

A systematic review published by the *Cochrane Library* found that there is significant evidence that music interventions help alleviate symptoms of anxiety, pain and fatigue in [cancer patients](#), while also boosting their quality of life.

Led by Joke Bradt, PhD, associate professor in Drexel University's College of Nursing and Health Professions, a team looked into studies that examined the impact of music therapy (a personalized music experience offered by trained music therapists) and music medicine (listening to pre-recorded music provided by a doctor or nurse) on psychological and physical outcomes in people with cancer.

"We found that music therapy interventions specifically help improve patients' quality of life," explained Bradt. "These are important findings as these outcomes play an important role in patients' overall well-being."

A total of 52 trials were examined in the review, constituting of 3,731 participants with cancer. Twenty-three of the trials were categorized as music therapy and the remaining 29 were classified as music medicine interventions.

Overall, one of the most impactful findings was that music interventions of all kinds resulted in a moderate-to-strong effect in reducing patients' anxiety.

When it came to pain reduction, the researchers found a large treatment benefit; for fatigue, a small-to-moderate treatment effect was found.

Small reductions in heart and respiratory rates, as well as lowered blood pressure, were also linked to music interventions.

"The results of single studies suggest that music listening may reduce the need for anesthetics and analgesics, as well as decreased recovery time

and duration of hospitalization, but more research is needed for these outcomes," according to Bradt and her co-authors.

When comparing music therapy to music medicine, the team saw a moderate increase in patients' quality of life when music therapy was applied. There was not a similar effect in the case of music medicine interventions.

"Both music medicine and music therapy interventions play an important role in cancer care but we didn't quite know yet which interventions may be best suited for which type of outcome," Bradt said.

In light of the benefits to cancer patients' quality of life, and specifically their levels of anxiety, pain and fatigue, the researchers hope [music](#) interventions will become more widespread.

"We hope that the findings of this review will encourage [health care providers](#) in medical settings to seriously consider the use of [music therapy](#) in the psychosocial care of people with cancer," Bradt said.

More information: *Cochrane Library*, [DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD006911.pub3](#)

Provided by Drexel University

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