

HEALTH

Music Gets You Moving and More

According to a recent article published on the NIH website, music may bring several health benefits.

"When you listen to or create music, it affects how you think, feel, move, and more," says neuroscientist Dr. Robert Finkelstein, who co-leads NIH's music and health initiative. "Today, modern technologies are helping researchers learn more about how the brain works, what parts of the brain respond to music, and how music might help ease symptoms of certain diseases and conditions," he explains.

Your Brain on Music

The brain is a complex processing hub. It's the control center of your nervous system, the network of nerve cells that carry messages to and from your body and the brain. A healthy brain tries to make sense of the world around you and the constant information it receives, including sound and music. "Sound is an important and profound force in our lives," explains Northwestern University neuroscientist Dr. Nina Kraus. "The more we exercise our sound processing in the brain, the better the brain becomes at making sense of sound and the world around us. Music does this more than any other sound."

Music and other sounds enter the ear as sound waves. These create vibrations on our eardrum that are transformed into electrical signals. The electrical signals travel up the auditory nerve to the brain's auditory cortex. This brain area interprets the sound into something we recognize and understand.

"Studies show that when a certain beat is embedded in music, it can help people with Parkinson's disease walk," Finkelstein says. Another study is looking at how dance compares to other types of exercise in people with Parkinson's disease.

There's also evidence that music may be helpful for people with other health conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, dementia, traumatic brain injury, stroke, aphasia, autism, and hearing loss.

Building Strong Minds

Playing a musical instrument engages many parts of the brain at once. This can especially benefit children and teens, whose brains are still developing. Introducing music to young kids can positively influence their ability to focus, how they act, and language development.

Being musical may also protect you from hearing loss as you age. We naturally lose our hearing ability over time. In particular, it becomes harder to hear conversations in a loud environment. But researchers have found that musicians are better at picking out a person's voice in a noisy background.

Music Therapy

Listening to and making music on your own can bring health benefits. But some people may also benefit from the help of a board-certified music therapist. Music therapists are trained in how to use music to meet the mental, social, and physical needs of people with different health conditions.

"Music therapy can take



LEE HILLIARD

many forms that go beyond listening to music," explains Dr. Sheri Robb, a music therapist and behavioral intervention researcher at Indiana University.

Music therapists can use certain parts of music, like the rhythm or melody, to help people regain abilities they've lost from a brain injury or developmental disability. For example, a person who's had a stroke may be able to sing words, but not speak them.

Music therapists also rely on the social qualities of music. Shared musical experiences can help a family member connect with a loved one who has dementia. Music can also be used to help young people with behavior disorders learn ways to manage their emotions.

Music in Your Life

Music can offer many health benefits, but it may not be helpful for everyone. Traumatic injuries and brain conditions can change the way a person perceives and responds to music. Some people may find some types of music overstimulating. Others may find that certain music brings up emotional or traumatic memories.

"It's important for healthcare providers to identify and understand when music isn't helpful and may be harmful," Robb says. "And this is an area where music therapists can be helpful."

As scientists continue to learn more about music and the brain, try striking a chord for your health. Whether you're looking to boost your mood, stay connected to others, or improve symptoms of a health condition, add a little music to your life.

"Think of music like physical fitness or what you eat," Kraus says. "To see the most health benefits, try to include music as a regular, consistent part of your life. It's never too late to add music to your life."

For a link to the entire article plus many more valuable resources on this subject go to www.chcneo.com/education and click on the musical notes icon.

Locally, Community Health Center of Northeast Oklahoma, Inc., dba Afton, Grove and Welch Community Health Centers continue to serve the area with the finest in personalized health care. For details or to schedule an appointment contact (918) 257-8029, (918) 801-7504 or (918) 788-3918 or check us out on the web at www.chcneo.com, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter. A sliding payment scale is available for patients based on family size and income.

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Reducing stress to avoid emotional eating

When it comes to managing weight, stress can be a killer, often sabotaging the best laid plans. For instance if the choice is between curbing the immediate impulse to eat or keeping your sanity, weight management plans can be pushed to the side.

Emotional eating is eating when you're not hungry. And when we become anxious, angry, or overwhelmed, a desire to eat or overeat can take over. Yet, what your body may really need is a break, not a snack. The next time you feel your stress level rising, try taking a different approach. In ten minutes or less, the following tips can help you to reduce eating impulses by giving your body a chance to relax.

- **Draw** — drawing can have a calming effect and help to reduce stress. If you're not comfortable starting with a blank page, try using an adult coloring book. That's right, what used to be just for kids, is now available to adults! Adult coloring books have become such a trend they



SEAN BRIDGES

are now topping bestseller lists.

- **Walk** — motion reduces stress and walking is meditation in motion. Focusing on this single task, can help you to calm and clear your mind.

- **Read** — in as little as 6 minutes reading can slow down your heart rate, ease muscle tension, and reduce stress levels by 68%. Next time you're feeling stressed try opening a book instead of the refrigerator.

- **Breathe** — relieve stress with just a breath. According to The American Institute of Stress, to effectively reduce stress, we need to activate the body's natural relaxation response. Focused, deep

breathing helps activate that response by increasing oxygen to the brain, promoting a state of calmness.

- **Face massage** — stress isn't always in the mind, your body can hold tension too. A face massage can be an effective way to stretch out more than 50 muscles. Performing circular motions around the eyes and jaw line can help to increase blood flow and relax muscles.

- **Pets** — there's a reason pets are used in hospitals and clinics. They have a calming effect on patients. Numerous studies have shown that spending time with pets, either playing or just snuggling, can help reduce tension and anxiety.

- **Humor** — Laughter is a great way to manage stress, and reading or telling a joke can be the perfect way to begin. Don't know any? Here's one to help you get started: "A man walks into a doctor's office. He has a carrot in his nose, a tomato in his left ear and a banana in his right. 'What's the matter

with me?" he asks. The doctor replies, 'You're not eating right.'"

According to recent reports, stress can affect short term memory, particularly in older adults. So don't be surprised if a wave of stress makes you forget how it feels to be calm—and how to achieve that calm. Making stress-reducers a part of your daily routine can help you avoid the problem. For instance, scheduling 10 minute daily walks on your calendar, keeping books near at hand, or setting an alarm on your phone to remember to do deep breathing exercises, can serve as reminders.

Stress is a natural part of life but it doesn't need to lead to mindless eating. The next time you're ready to raid the kitchen cabinets because of stress, take a break. Ask yourself, "What am I really hungry for?" There's a chance your mind and body may be craving something other than food.

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Raising confident girls

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Raising a confident girl means she'll be able to claim her strength to meet life's challenges as she grows older. Trouble is, girls' self-confidence tends to wane as they leave childhood and enter adolescence.

One recent study published in the journal *Science* found that girls as young as 6 believe that brilliance is a male trait. The study also found that at 6 girls start to steer themselves away from activities that are perceived as "really, really smart."

Parents can help nurture their daughter's self-confidence, but even the most knowledgeable moms and dads need some help. Katie Hurley, a child and adolescent psychotherapist and parenting expert, is the author of a new book of advice for raising strong, confident and compassionate daughters. "No More Mean Girls" will be available Jan. 30, but Hurley is sharing her tips here.

"Girls are at risk for experiencing a dip in self-esteem somewhere between the ages of 9 and 11, and that self-esteem will either soar or remain low as girls enter the teen years. This happens to coincide with the time that girls begin to step outside of the parental orbit of control," Hurley said.

The more time girls spend away from the parental safe zone, "the more pressure they feel to cope with failures and find success on their own. It's important to remember that low self-esteem isn't simply a bad feeling or two because things didn't work out as planned. Low self-esteem is a state of mind that can negatively affect every part of a girl's life such as friendships,



COURTESY PHOTOS

The book "No More Mean Girls" by Katie Hurley, a child and adolescent psychotherapist and parenting expert, will be available Jan. 30.

academics, family relationships, sports," Hurley said.

Talking helps

Studies show that teen girls experience more stress, anxiety and depression, while teen boys score higher on self-esteem, Hurley said.

"One thing that helps girls is to talk about the micro-stressors they experience that contribute to dips in self-esteem. Girls are conditioned to stuff their feelings down and simply 'get over it' when things are hard, but this is no easy task. Bringing those stressors and upsets to the table helps normalize the ups and downs that girls experience and encourages girls to lift each other up as they work through the dips together," Hurley said.

Escape self-doubt

"One thing I see over and over again in girls with low self-esteem is that their thoughts are stuck in a negative feedback loop. They assume the worst ('everyone hates me'), they react and interact according to their assumptions ('I should just sit alone'),

and the results confirm their assumptions ('no one bothered to sit with me because everyone hates me'). This negative thought process can repeat for quite some time and affect multiple areas of a girl's life," Hurley said.

Girls can break the negative feedback loop by positively reframing the way they view and experience events, ideas and emotions, Hurley said. Parents can help girls practice cognitive reframing by doing the following:

"First, give your daughter time to vent. She has to release her negative emotions to process them. Second, ask her to state the negative thought that runs through her mind. Third, ask her to create a positive counter-statement. For the girl who thinks 'everyone hates me,' for example, a realistic positive statement is, 'I have a good friend on my soccer team. We have fun together.' This subtle shift in thinking can help girls change their negative thoughts to positive ones," Hurley said.

Other things parents can do to help boost self-esteem include spending one-on-one time in a low-stress environment, for example hiking, going to the movies or shopping together, Hurley said.

"Encourage healthy risk-taking like trying a new sport or activity or cooking things independently," she said.

Another idea is to create a "wheel of strengths" to showcase her positive attributes and talents.

"Include a wide array of talents, not just sports," Hurley said.

Don't fear failure

Fear of failure is a significant source of stress for young girls.

"In this superkid generation, girls feel like they need to reach great heights to make their mark in this world. Encouraging girls to fail aloud and learn from their missteps helps them build resilience and develop empathy and compassion for their friends, who experience their own failures along the way," Hurley said.