

Generations

The health benefits of music

An article by Michelle Crouch caught my eye recently in the June issue of *Readers Digest* because it had to do with the health benefits of music and, as an avid lover of just about all types of music, from opera to pop, and from oldies to country, music has to be big part of my life no matter what age I am while listening to it.

Starting with 45s in the 1960s, to disco in the '70s, and then progressing from cassettes to CDs, and now to streaming music, it's always been part of my makeup with some songs bringing back special memories, good and bad, and some music, such as favorite opera arias sung by Luciano Pavarotti, to an old concert DVD of an awesome concert night of good songs and an amazing artist like Stevie Nicks at Red Rocks or Eric Clapton at Jones Beach.

So, it didn't surprise me to read in Crouch's article that listening to happy music at work can help one complete tasks more quickly, especially if doing something repetitive such as checking email or filing documents. One study even showed that the accuracy and efficiency of surgeons improved when they worked with the music of their choice in the background. It gave me an idea: The next time my husband or I need surgery, another question to ask in pre-op is what music the surgeon does his best work while listening to and make sure it's available.

According to another study, music decreases levels of the stress hormone cortisol just as well as massage therapy does. Scientists randomly assigned anxious patients to listen to music either during massage therapy or while lying in a dim room.

After three months, those who just listened to music experienced the same drop in anxiety as those who also got massages. I have a feeling, though, that a lot depended on the music. For example, Mozart might calm one easier than Eminem.

Back to surgery, the article also

reported that listening to music before surgery has been shown



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to ease anxiety and limit the need for sedatives and, after surgery, it helps reduce pain. An analysis of 73 studies published in 2015 confirmed that listening to music before, during, or after surgery improves anxiety and pain levels, which, in turn, means less pain medication. Thinking about my own occasion in a hospital delivery room, Joan Baez's "We Shall Overcome" might have helped me during the forced natural childbirth of my third child.

No. 4 on the list was that people tend to come up with more creative solutions when they listen to upbeat music than when they sit in silence and it may be because music improves your brain's flexibility or because it relaxes you enough for the creative juices to flow.

Coupled with creativity, when you listen to music, your brain releases dopamine, the same neurotransmitter that's released when you eat chocolate — and music has no calories or carbs.

Music also makes exercise more palpable whether you're running, biking, walking or getting on a treadmill because it distracts you from your discomfort and motivates you to stay with it. I hunted for the most popular workout songs, but, frankly, I didn't know any of the new ones, so I found the top five oldie workout songs that I know would get my blood pumping, starting with the No. 1-rated workout oldie: "Respect" by Aretha Franklin, followed by "Born to be Wild," by Steppenwolf, "I'm a Believer" by the Monkees, "Dancing in the Street" by Martha and the Vandellas, and "Jumpin' Jack Flash" by The Rolling Stones. The entire list is available at www.sparkpeople.com.

Lullabies aren't just for babies.

Listening to music before bed can help you fall asleep faster, wake up less often during the night and feel more rested in the morning, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

And, according to Crouch's article, music has been used to heal for centuries, and now we're learning why it works. The latest meta-analysis of 400 studies finds that listening to music promotes the body's production of an antibody called immunoglobulin A that actually attacks viruses and bacteria, as well as "natural killer cells," which kill invading viruses and cancerous cells.

The next one was surprising and makes sense. Scientists have proved that people judge a period of waiting as shorter when music is playing. A retailer uses playing music to his or her advantage so you stay longer and spend more money, like in a bar or restaurant. Studies also revealed that grocery sales increase by 38 percent when the background music is slow, such as love songs by Celine Dion in the produce aisle.

Listening to music that brings you joy causes blood vessels to expand, increasing blood flow and improving cardiovascular health, a University of Maryland study found. A separate review of 26 studies covering almost 1,400 heart disease patients found music reduced heart rate, blood pressure and anxiety.

Even more amazing were studies performed with Alzheimer's patients. Hearing songs from their past helped them retrieve memories and communicate more effectively.

As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow famously said, "Music is the universal language of mankind," and it's now proven that it's also an amazing ingredient to healing one's health.

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