Music Therapy and Depression

What We Know

› Music therapy is a complementary therapy in the category of mind-body medicine in which board-certified music therapists use music to evaluate and treat impairments in clients’ emotional, physical, cognitive, and social functioning. Music therapy is designed to complement an interdisciplinary approach to client care and to improve quality of life (QOL); it is not intended to replace traditional treatments or medications\(^6\)

• Music therapy can be used to reduce anxiety, promote relaxation, and improve mood\(^2,11\)

• Music therapy uses receptive technique, active technique, and group efforts\(^6,8,19\)
  – Listening to and discussing music with the therapist is called “receptive technique”\(^8\)
  - The reaction of a client to music is part of the process for both the evaluation and therapy\(^19\)
  - Particular types of music or instrumental sounds often bring emotions to the surface and facilitate client discussion about what he or she is feeling\(^19\)
  – Singing or producing music using instruments is called “active technique”\(^8\)
  – Group music therapy involving several clients encourages cooperation and builds confidence\(^6\)

• The therapeutic effects of music therapy include\(^8\)
  – relief of chronic and transient anxiety
  – improvement in sleep

• The brain that engages in music is changed by the act of actively engaging with music\(^25\)
  – The act of listening to music involves brain processes that are perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and motor\(^15,25\)
  – Therapeutic use of changes in the brain brought about by listening to music allows for those changes to be generalized to brain functions other than listening to music and the re-training of brain habits, such as learning to use body parts that have been immobilized by stroke

• Clients with psychiatric disorders (e.g., schizophrenia), emotional disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression), and/or cognitive disorders (e.g., dementia) may be treated with music therapy\(^5,6,8,16,19,20,24\)
  – Major depressive disorder (MDD) is an emotional disorder characterized by\(^1,5,19\)
    - a prolonged (i.e., greater than 2 months) depressed mood
    - reduced social functioning
    - not enjoying formerly pleasurable activities
    - impaired quality of life
  – Individuals with MDD may benefit from music therapy\(^4,5,6,8,16,17,19,20,24\)
    - Individuals with MDD show greater improvement in depressive symptoms and sleep quality when treated with music therapy compared to treatment with hypnotic medications\(^8\)
- In a systematic review of five clinical trials, four trials reported improvements in symptoms of MDD in clients randomized to music therapy versus clients who received treatment with antidepressants(12).

- Individuals with chronic pain and MDD experience a decrease in pain and depression after participating in active music therapy(24).

- Surgical and cancer clients with MDD had improved scores on standardized psychological tests after receiving music therapy(14,16).

- A study using music therapy for female mastectomy clients while in the hospital found a significant decrease in depression compared to female mastectomy clients who did not receive music intervention. In addition, those clients who received the music therapy had a shorter length of stay in the hospital(26).

- Clients with MDD in skilled nursing facilities had significantly improved depression rating scales after music therapy was resumed, following a 3-month break in therapy(20).

- Pregnant women with MDD reported improved mood following a 2-week course of music therapy(5).

- In a randomized control study of 222 pregnant women, participants who received music therapy had a significant decrease in depression and anxiety symptoms compared to participants who did not receive music therapy(22).

- Older adults had significantly reduced depression scores after having receptive music therapy weekly in their homes(4).

- A meta-analysis of five research articles on the effects of music therapy on children (ages 8-18) with internalizing mental health disorders (i.e., depression or anxiety) reported reduction in severity of symptoms across all of the studies(9).

- Music therapy can have a positive impact for clients with dementia and co-occurring depression. Researchers found that when older adult clients of a nursing home with diagnoses of dementia participated in music therapy for 12 sessions, their depression decreased and they experienced improved short-term recall. The music therapy seemed to provide a relaxing stimulus and improve the clients’ moods(12).

- Similar results were found in a study in Asia: clients who received music therapy had a significant decrease in depression scores(12).

- Authors of a literature review on music therapy and mental health found that music therapy as an adjunct had a more positive effect on mental illness, including depression, than standard treatment by itself or no treatment at all(17).

- Music therapy helps clients with MDD(5,19).

- reflect on and articulate feelings(19)

- improve emotional awareness(19)

- gain pleasure from a recreational activity(5)

- reminiscence about happier times(19)

- improve overall mood(5,23)

- improve concentration(18)

- In a systematic review of seven studies including 319 clients, increased frequency and duration of music therapy was associated with significant improvement in depressive symptoms(10).

**What We Can Do**

› Learn about music therapy for clients with MDD so you can accurately assess your clients’ unique characteristics and their potential for benefiting from music therapy; share this information with your colleagues.

› Develop an awareness of your own cultural values, beliefs, and biases, and develop knowledge about the histories, traditions, and values of your clients. Adopt treatment methodologies that reflect the cultural needs of the client(3,13,21).

› Social workers should practice with awareness of and adherence to the social work principles of respect for human rights and human dignity, social justice, and professional conduct as described in the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Statement of Ethical Principles, as well as the national code of ethics that applies in the country in which they practice(13). For example, in the United States, social workers should adhere to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence; and become knowledgeable of the NASW ethical standards as they apply to music therapy and depression, and practice accordingly(21).

› Maintain a good working relationship with music therapists.
Request referral for music therapy, if appropriate
Consider using videoconferencing if a music therapist is not available in a client’s community.
Educate clients on the value of music therapy, types of music therapy available, and the likelihood of receiving benefit from music therapy.
Develop a list of online resources to share with colleagues and clients such as,
- Peterson Family Foundation at https://petersonfamilyfoundation.org/news/4-extremely-helpful-music-therapy-resources-need-know/
- World Federation of Music Therapy at https://www.wfmt.info/
- American Music Therapy Association at https://www.musictherapy.org/
- Canadian Association of Music Therapist at https://www.musictherapy.ca/
If administering music therapy in your facility,
- assess each patient’s interest in receiving music therapy
- provide a variety of music and allow patients to choose preferred music
- use headphones when playing recorded music to minimize noise distractions. Verify that headphones are appropriately cleaned, or use disposable ear pads/buds

Coding Matrix
References are rated using the following codes, listed in order of strength:

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<td>SR</td>
<td>Published systematic or integrative literature review</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>Published research (randomized controlled trial)</td>
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<td>Published research (not randomized controlled trial)</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Case histories, case studies</td>
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References


