

Music: a powerful natural drug.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

The good effect that music can have on us has always been recognised. Kings and queens have commissioned top composers to produce pieces to help them sleep, to soothe them, or to help them celebrate. Music is universal, it doesn't matter how sophisticated the society or how primitive the tribe, people will listen to their form of music. Religious orders, of monks for example, although they will lock themselves away from everyday temptations, will nevertheless make music for themselves.



Modern science proves its effect.

With the latest brain-imaging techniques, we can see that music directly affects the brain, lighting up different parts of the brain depending on the type of music played, and the listener's reaction to it. We can see that some music has clear and highly beneficial effects on us whereas other music has the reverse. In the same way, studies have been done on its effects on the listener's blood vessels. Some music will have the effect of dilating the vessels (which is predominantly good) whereas other music will have the reverse effect. So we can see from this that music is 'strong medicine' and that we are sensitive to it. Listening to music that suits us and suits our mood can be an extremely good thing to do whereas doing the reverse is clearly not.

How to find music that has a good effect on you.

The first thing to realise is that you probably want different music at different times. For example, at bedtime you may not want 'party music'. Sometimes you will want music that will relax you, other times you might want music that you can work by, and other times you might want music that will fortify you, making you feel upbeat and 'strong'.

And it has never been easier to find the music you want. One way is to find radio stations that suit you, and there's such a wide range available that simply to stick to the station you have always listened to may not be the best you can do. You will probably find a station that suits your needs almost perfectly. In the UK, Radio 2 is the most listened to station and a recent study found that the kind of music it specialises in does predominantly have a good effect on people. Even so, it is important to be sensitive to your own personal needs and find the station that really suits you best.



If you have a smart device or computer, then, again, things have never been easier. You can stream music, you can make playlists labelled 'relaxing', or 'upbeat', or 'music to work by', or whatever you choose, and you can swap playlists with friends. You can shuffle the files about, changing your mind as to what effect different tracks have on you. And, if you want to, you can easily skip a track to one that better matches your mood.

In summary.

We have two findings. First, music has a big effect on you, and second, it is important to control that effect, listen to music that benefits you rather than harms you. You need to listen to music, but be sensitive to its effect, and skip to music that suits you. That way you stand to benefit a very great deal.

In Session:

For you personally, answer the following questions (discuss with your neighbours if you wish). Then the group leader will invite everybody to share their answers.

Name some tracks that you know will always relax you:

Name some tracks that you know will always make you feel upbeat and 'strong':

Name some tracks which neither make you feel relaxed nor make you feel 'strong' but you like listening to anyway:

Project:

Spend some time during every day listening to music. Make sure that it is music that has a good effect on you in some way, makes you feel relaxed, or upbeat, or just that you enjoy listening to. Try to do that for at least 20 minutes every day, and possibly much longer. Be ready to tell the group what effect this had on you, next time.