

# MUSIC THERAPY POCKET GUIDE

## FAST FACTS

- The field of music therapy gained recognition following its use in VA hospitals after WWII to aid in the healing process.
- Brain scans seem to show that music and exercise are the only two activities that stimulate your entire brain.

## WHAT IS MUSIC THERAPY?

Music therapy is a well-recognized clinical intervention that uses music within a therapeutic process to assist the patient in identifying and dealing with social, cognitive, emotion or physical concerns.

Additionally, a music therapist will assess the needs of a patient by the response he/she has to music played or how they respond to questions when using music to assess their mental/physical condition. They will then use the information gleaned from the assessment to design a therapeutic program.

The therapeutic intervention is tailored to the individual's needs and is constructed to help a patient achieve her/his therapeutic goals. The musical intervention may involve: music coming from the therapist or the patient playing a musical instrument and/or singing, the patient composing music, the patient listening to or dancing/moving to a piece of music.

These interventions allow the patient to express feelings or thoughts in a more complex and multidimensional manner than with words only and can help the patient address traumatic or uncomfortable situations without the use of words.

## WHAT CONDITIONS DOES MUSIC THERAPY TREAT?

Music therapy is used to help with a variety of physical and mental health conditions and address symptoms related to chronic health concerns including:

- Alzheimer's
- Autism/autism spectrum disorder
- Dementia
- Neurological disorders
- Problems with cognitive function
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood disorders
- Attention deficit disorder/Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Hospital/procedural anxiety
- Physical therapy/rehabilitation
- Speech loss
- Chronic and acute pain relief
- Learning disabilities

## Is there evidence that music therapy works?

In the last 20 years, as patients increasingly integrate complementary and alternative medicine into their treatment plans, more and more literature is being published exploring and confirming the positive impact music therapy has on certain conditions. A sample includes:

- A systematic review of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder who received music therapy as an adjunct treatment found that music therapy significantly improved skills related to social interaction, verbal communication, behavior initiation and reciprocating socially expressed emotional cues.<sup>1</sup>
- A systematic review of dementia patients who received music therapy found that the music therapy had a moderately large impact on reducing disruptive behaviors, anxiety levels and depressive moods, and improving cognitive functioning.<sup>2</sup>
- A randomized control trial of people suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder found that those who engaged in music therapy in addition to usual care experienced a reduction in their obsessions/obsessive behaviors as well as co-morbid anxiety and/or depression.<sup>3</sup>
- Palliative care patients who received music therapy experienced a significant reduction in pain.<sup>4</sup>

- Cancer patients who participated in music therapy were better able to manage their symptoms, expressed more hope about their ability to survive cancer, and were better able to access and discuss traumatic memories associated with their diagnosis.<sup>5</sup> Music therapy has also been shown to decrease anxiety and depression in cancer patients.<sup>6</sup>

If you or your healthcare provider are seeking more in-depth research on the effectiveness or impact of music therapy on a particular health concern, visit <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=music+therapy>

### Are there precautions, side effects or safety concerns I should be aware of before I start music therapy?

Music therapy is widely considered a safe way of addressing physical and mental conditions when delivered by a well-trained certified music therapist. Please note that any form of therapy can unearth uncomfortable emotions and may cause you to experience increased levels of psychological discomfort.

### How often should I seek treatment from a music therapy practitioner? How long is each session?

How often and for how long you will attend a music therapy session depends on why you are seeking the help of a clinician and the program the music therapist has developed to address your physical or psychological condition. Typically, classes or an individual session with a practitioner can run anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour.

### What training/certifications do music therapy clinicians need to have in order to practice?

The most common certified and nationally recognized music therapist designation is the MT-BC (Music Therapist-Board Certified). To practice music therapy a therapist will have received a bachelor's degree or higher from one of the 70 programs recognized by the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA).

In addition to specific coursework mandated by AMTA, to qualify for certification, music therapists in training will have to complete 1,200 clinical hours before they are allowed to take the certification exam. The Certification Board for Music Therapists is responsible for overseeing the exam and subsequent certification process of becoming an MT-BC.

In addition to the MT-BC, there are three other music therapy designations that are nationally recognized as demonstrating adequate qualifications to practice music therapy: ACMT, CMT or RMT. These certifications are no longer awarded, but people who received them previously and continue to maintain their certification are included in the National Music Therapy Registry.

### How do I find a music therapist near me?

- American Music Therapy Association allows you to search by therapists, certification and the condition you would like to treat. <https://netforum.avectra.com/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=amta2&WebCode=IndSearch>
- The Certification Board for Music Therapists Search [http://www.cbmt.org/certificant\\_search](http://www.cbmt.org/certificant_search)

### Will my insurance company cover the cost of seeing a music therapy practitioner?

Whether your insurance company covers music therapy depends on your individual coverage. Most insurance companies will cover some of the costs of music therapy services. The best way to find out whether your insurance company covers music therapy is to contact your insurance provider.

### Should I inform my primary care physician that I am seeing a music therapist?

Individual or group music therapy can be used alongside any conventional treatments you are receiving. Music therapy is not meant to take the place of a proven conventional treatment. Any decisions regarding treatment plans should be discussed with your doctor(s) prior to making changes to your treatment plan.

#### Endnotes:

- 1 Geretsegger, M., Elefant, C., Mössler KA, Gold C. (2014). Music therapy for people with autism spectrum disorder. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 17(6).
- 2 Chang, Y.S., Chu, H., Yang, C.Y., Tsai, J.C., Chung, M.H., Liao, Y.M., Chi, M.J., Liu, M.F., & Chou, K.R. (2015). The efficacy of music therapy for people with dementia: A meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 24: pp. 3425-3440.
- 3 Shirani Bidabadi, S., & Mehryar, A. (2015). Music therapy as an adjunct to standard treatment for obsessive compulsive disorder and co-morbid anxiety and depression: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 184: pp. 13-17.
- 4 Gutsell, K.J., Schluchter, M., Margevicius, S., DeGolia, P.A., McLaughlin, B., Harris, M., Mecklenburg, J., & Wiencek, C. (2013). Music therapy reduces pain in palliative care patients: a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Manage*, 45(5): pp. 822-831.
- 5 Bradt, J., Potvin, N., Kesslick, A., Shim, M., Radl, D., Schriver, E., Gracely, E.J., & Komarnicky-Kocher, L.T. (2015). The impact of music therapy versus music medicine on psychological outcomes and pain in cancer patients: a mixed methods study. *Supportive Care in Cancer*, 23(5): pp. 1261-1271.
- 6 Jasemi, M., Aazami, S., & Zabihi, R. E. (2016). The Effects of Music Therapy on Anxiety and Depression of Cancer Patients. *Indian Journal of Palliative Care*, 22(4): pp. 455-458.