

## **Music Therapy for People with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's Disease**

Music may benefit the four million Americans suffering from Alzheimer's and could potentially help many of the one million Americans with Parkinson's disease, according to several studies that have looked at music therapy's effect on memory and other mental activities. One study, conducted at the University of California, Irvine, found that people with Alzheimer's who listened to a Mozart sonata greatly improved their scores on memory tests. Some researchers have thought that music had a relaxing effect on those with Alzheimer's disease. A 1999 study from the University of Miami School of Medicine found that Alzheimer patients who listened to 30 to 40 minutes of music five times a week had increased levels of melatonin in their blood.

Music therapists are trained health professionals who use breathing exercises, dancing, singing and instrument playing to help people do everything, from decreasing pain and stress during labor and surgery to improving mental function and movement.

A study conducted by Colorado State University's Center for Research in NeuroRehabilitation and the University of Michigan's Center for Human Motor Research found that people with Parkinson's who listened to music while walking could go faster, take bigger steps and showed better overall balance and control of movement than those walking without music. The scientists speculate that the music helped to distract patients from the pain of doing these tasks.

Music can elevate mood, too, and thereby cut the depression often experienced by people with Parkinson's.

Based on promising findings, some researches have proposed that music therapy, in combination with physical therapy, should be the rule rather than the exception when treating those with Parkinson's.

For more information on music therapy visit the American Music Therapy Association at [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org), the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function at Beth Abraham Family of Health Services at [www.bethabe.org](http://www.bethabe.org) and the Alzheimer's Association at [www.alz.org/hc/qcare/music/htm](http://www.alz.org/hc/qcare/music/htm).

Excerpted with permission from Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter (2/01), 800-274-7581.