Music Therapy May Benefit Patients After a Heart Attack

Individuals who listened to 30 minutes of music they found soothing experienced less pain and a lower risk for several heart conditions.

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They say music is good for the soul, but what about the heart? New findings presented at the American College of Cardiology's (ACC) Annual Scientific Session suggest that soothing tunes can help alleviate anxiety and pain in those recovering from a heart attack, according to a press release from ACC.

For the study, researchers gathered 350 Serbian patients diagnosed with heart attack and early post-infarction angina (episodes of chest pain following a heart attack). Scientists randomly assigned half of the patients to receive standard treatment, while the other half participated in regular music-listening sessions in addition to standard treatment.

The drug therapy consisted of several different medications, such as nitrates, aspirin, clot-preventing drugs, beta blockers, statins, calcium channel blockers, blood pressure–lowering meds and the angina-reducing drug ranolazine.

Those in the music therapy group listened to nine 30-second samples of soothing music, while researchers examined each person's body for involuntary responses to the samples based on the dilation or narrowing of their pupils. Afterward, scientists collaborated with each patient on optimal music tempo and tonality to determine the selections their bodies best responded to.

Patients listened to their musical selections for 30 minutes each day, usually while resting. Participants logged their sessions and returned for follow-up assessments every three months for the first year and annually thereafter.

After seven years, patients who received music therapy in conjunction with standard treatment noticed a reduction in anxiety, pain sensation and pain distress compared with those given only the standard treatment. (The music listeners' anxiety scores and angina symptoms were, on average, one third and about one quarter lower, respectively.

In addition, researchers noted that individuals experienced reduced rates of heart failure (18%), heart attack (23%), a decrease in the need for coronary artery bypass surgery (20%) and a lower

rate of cardiac death (16%).

The study's lead author, Predrag Mitrovic, MD, PhD, a professor of cardiology at the University of Belgrade School of Medicine in Serbia, explained that music may help counteract the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, the division of the nervous system responsible for the body's fight-or-flight response that increases heart rate and blood pressure and can strain the cardiovascular system.

Mitrovic suggested that regular music-listening sessions could help reduce the anxiety associated with angina following a heart attack. Additionally, he plans to study how music therapy benefits particular subgroups of patients, including those of a certain age or with conditions such as diabetes.

Almost half of Americans don't recognize the signs and symptoms of a heart attack. Click here to learn more.

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