

Music & its Connection with Mental Health

Mike Woodham

Recently there has been a large focus on veterinarians and their mental health. There is a lot of data and research looking into some of the contributing factors and some of the ways in which to assist or mitigate these issues.

It is very possible that at some point you have felt the influence that music has on your mood. Sometimes a song takes you to the top and sometimes it seems that it relaxes you so much that you could sleep for 18 hours in a row. What you may not know is that music is incredibly beneficial for assisting in alleviating stress and managing mental health.

When you listen to music, multiple areas of your brain become engaged and active. But when you actually play an instrument, that activity becomes more like a full-body brain workout.

Thanks to instruments like functional magnetic imaging (fMRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) scanners, neuroscientists have made enormous breakthroughs in understanding how our brains work.

1. Music Grows Your Brain

Research into the nature of how the corpus callosum impacts on the brain's functions, and how learning a musical instrument impacts on this, is ongoing. Recently, neuroscientists have dug deeper and found that changes in the corpus callosum may be dependent on the type of musical training a musician does and could be localised to the anterior corpus callosum. This area has shown an increase in bi-manual coordination (where the brain coordinates

simultaneous multiple movements like using a knife and fork).

2. Music assists your memory

Recent therapy using music with Alzheimer's and dementia patients has had profound results in memory recall and connection to identity (see ABC catalyst '[Music on the Brain](http://abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4421003.htm)', abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4421003.htm)

3. Music assists in reducing stress and anxiety

In a study of patients in a surgical holding area, many become stressed and anxious. In a hospital setting music reduces patients' anxiety. This study determined that music can reduce the anxiety and stress of patients in the surgical holding area. The results strongly suggest that if music were available to all patients in the surgical holding area, most would select this option, and they would experience less anxiety.

4. Music has social benefits

A poverty-stricken town in Paraguay built on landfill should be one of the saddest places on earth, but instead it has used rubbish to create an orchestra that is getting worldwide attention. In this area more than 40% of children don't finish school because their parents need them to work. Favio Chavez, being an environmental engineer but with a musical background, decided to help the children by teaching them music lessons. The idea was simply to keep the kids from playing in the landfill (Google 'junkyard orchestra' and 'landfill harmonic' to hear and see for yourself)

5. Music reduces stress hormone

The soothing power of music is well-established. It has a unique link to our emotions, so can be an extremely effective stress management tool.

Listening to music can have a tremendously relaxing effect on our minds and bodies, especially slow, quiet classical music. This type of music can have a beneficial effect on our physiological functions, slowing the pulse and heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and decreasing the levels of stress hormones.

6. It only takes 20 hours to learn an instrument

According to Josh Kauffman (international best selling author *The Personal MBA: Master the*

Art of Business) it only takes 45 mins a day for about a month to be competent in anything. You may have heard it takes 10,000 hours to MASTER something, but really who has the time to get Tiger Woods good at golf? When all you want to do is having a relaxing game with your friends (see JoshKauffman's TEDx Talk, *The First 20 Hours - How to Learn Anything* [youtube.com/watch?v=5MgBikgcWnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MgBikgcWnY) or his book, *The First 20 Hours: How to Learn Anything... Fast*)

I can only say on a personal anecdotal level that music has had a profound influence on my life and, apart from my vet friends, all the best friends and connections I have made have been through my involvement in and pursuit of music.



Woodham Family Lemon and Lime Cheesecake Slice (easy to eat by hand at work)

Ingredients

2 blocks of Philly Cream Cheese
(IMPORTANT: Left out of fridge to soften)

1 can of condensed milk

Juice of 1 whole lemon

Juice of 1 whole lime

¼ cup of caster sugar

1/3 cup of thickened cream

1 packet of Arnotts Lattice biscuits



VEGETARIAN

Method

1. Layer a square container base with lattice biscuits.
2. Using an electric mixer on med to high speed, blend cream cheese into smooth mix without any lumps.
3. Add a small amount of condensed milk and mix for another minute on medium speed. Use a spatula to scrape down sides of the bowl and make sure cream cheese is not stuck on the bottom unmixed.
4. Gradually add in whole tin of condensed milk while mixer is on low speed. Make sure to keep scraping sides of the bowl with a spatula.
5. Cut lemon and lime in half and remove seeds, then juice.
6. Add the juice to the mixture while on low speed on the mixer.
7. Continue to mix the cream cheese and add castor sugar.

8. Once the sugar is well mixed in, pour over the lattice biscuits evenly.

Cover over and store in the fridge overnight to set.

Bio

Mike Woodham is the owner of Sugarland Veterinary Hospital and founder of the Australian Veterinary Orchestra. He has even been known to serenade the odd patient!

