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The sounds of music: music can have remarkable benefits for your health, or it can be destructive

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Have you ever sat somewhere and marveled at how quiet it was? You are acutely aware of sound because it is so unusual to be without noise, We always hear hum from machines, the rumble of traffic, a plane, or other people talking Modern noise pollution is subtle, inconspicuous, and more dangerous than we realize

Exposure to most noises causes irritation, stress, and can result in permanent hearing loss and health problems. It's difficult to eliminate noise, Often we try to cover offending ambient noise with music. If you like the music, it usually results in fewer physical problems

We know that brain waves are modified by sounds. Beta brain waves, those between 14 and 20 hertz are most common. We achieve relaxed concentration or lucid awareness when alpha waves, between 8 and 13 hertz, are present Music with about 60 beats per minute--particularly that of Mozart, Brahms, and Bach--shifts the brain's activity from beta to the higher-awareness alpha waves

It's called the Mozart Effect. This type of music lowers stress and increases concentration. A study in England found students scored 10 points higher on an IQ test after listening to Mozart compared to those exposed to silence, white noise, or other music. White noise is just low-level random sounds. Examples are radio static and running water.)

Researchers suggest that we respond to music because our bodies are rhythmic. Our breathing, heartbeat, and many other body functions have an intrinsic rhythm.

Certain music invigorates people, while other melodies calm them. Other tunes make you sleepy or keep you awake Supermarkets, department stores, and event managers have used music to shape human behavior. Music can be used to make people move faster or slower, to encourage them to shop longer, persuade them to action, or help them to relax.

Other recent research links exposure to music to improved mental skills. Einstein played the violin and believed this helped his subconscious mind to solve problems. Many people who suffer from insomnia find that some of Bach's music helps them. Lively popular music boosts energy and endurance. These results aren't new

But being exposed to music you dislike causes negative effects, including higher blood pressure and stress. Most adults refer to the tunes teenagers listen to as noise. Teens feel the same way about other people's music. There's a story about a large group of young people gathering daily near a convenience store. They weren't doing anything wrong, but their presence irritated the store's owner and customers. The owner had an idea. He piped classical music outside the store, and the teens quickly disappeared.

Martin Gardiner of Brown University checked the relationship between arrest records of teenagers and their involvement in music. Gardiner found that the more a teen was associated with music, the lower the arrest record. Teens with music education were less likely to get into trouble than students without it. Those who also played a musical instrument, played in a band, or were in a chorus had even fewer problems with the law.

Retail stores have discovered that sales increase when they play easy-listening music. Apparently this music calms shoppers and encourages them to spend more time in the store.

Light, easy-paced music tends to help most people concentrate for a longer time, and improves their ability to memorize facts. However, with some people this music has the opposite effect. It distracts and disturbs those who are more analytical or inhibited than the norm. Listen to various kinds of music to determine its effect on you.

The tempo of religious music induces a feeling of peace and helps a person cope with physical and emotional pain. On the other

end of the spectrum, heavy metal, rap, or martial music excites the nervous system and prompts people to dynamic action or aggressive behavior. It's not surprising that Gulf War pilots listened to recordings of heavy metal music before launching their offensive flights into battle.

Studies are under way to determine if music can cure or help emotional problems and people with brain injuries or Alzheimer's.

The effects of sounds on other aspects of nature have also been known for centuries. In southern India, farmers believe the gentle sounds of humming and buzzing insects guarantee healthy sprouting of the sugarcane. Carefully conducted experiments have proved that plants grow faster when music, especially tunes in the low frequency range of 100 to 600 hertz, are piped over the fields or into greenhouses. Farm animals and pets have been known to respond to music.

Your heartbeat tends to synchronize with any ambient pulsation. With modern rap music, there is concern as to what the unnatural rhythm changes do to listeners' bodies, emotions, and even their subconscious. Long-term effects are unknown.

Music will influence our health and behavior. By knowing about its effects, we can use it to our benefit.

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