

You Asked: Is Listening to Music Good For Your Health?

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If you're looking for an easy way to transform your mood, cue the music.

Studies have shown that music can buoy your mood and fend off depression. It can also improve blood flow in ways similar [to statins](#), lower your levels [of stress-related hormones like cortisol](#) and [ease pain](#). Listening to music before an operation can even [improve post-surgery outcomes](#).

How can music do so much good? Music seems to “selectively activate” neurochemical systems and brain structures associated with positive mood, emotion regulation, attention and memory in ways that promote beneficial changes, says Kim Innes, a professor of epidemiology at West Virginia University’s School of Public Health.

“Silence can be better than random listening,” says Joanne Loewy, an associate professor and director of the Louis Armstrong Center for Music & Medicine at Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York. “Some of our data show that putting on any old music can actually induce a stressful response.” (Just turn on the creepy themes from films like *Halloween* or *The Shining* if you need examples of how music can fan the flames of anxiety, rather than squelch them.)

Along with inducing stress, Loewy says, the wrong music can promote rumination or other unhelpful mental states. One [2015 study from Finland](#) found that music can bolster negative emotions—like anger, aggression or sadness—much the same way it can counteract these feelings. Why? The rhythm and other characteristics of the songs we select can modulate our heart rates and the activity of our brain’s neural networks, explains Daniel Levitin, a professor of psychology who researches the cognitive neuroscience of music at McGill University in Canada.