



# Using Music for Memory Care

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In the field of Neurologic Music Therapy, exciting new evidence is emerging as studies of music's effects on the brain become more credible. While music in itself cannot cure Alzheimer's Disease and the many forms of Dementia, it is certain that the use of music can greatly enhance the lives of our loved ones and increase their quality of life for an extended period of time. One does not have to be a Music Therapist, or even a trained musician, in order to implement some of the basic strategies that have been found to be effective while caring for someone with a cognitive impairment.

Whereas speech, physical movement, etc., utilize just one small area of the brain, music activates all of the neuropathways throughout both the brain's right and left hemispheres. Music is the only medium that provides a direct link to all of our senses and to our executive functions: cognition, speech and communication, emotions, motor control, eyesight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Music is "full brain," and music is "sensory." These are key factors in helping our loved ones to communicate as fully as possible for as long as possible. The more sensory input they receive, the greater their opportunity to respond verbally in order to tell us what they need, thereby increasing their quality of life.



Here are some specific ideas on how and when to utilize music with a loved one in daily living:

- **For Speech and Communication:** Singing. It is important that the songs be familiar and of the preferred musical genre of the person with memory loss. Whether she/he likes country music, classical, patriotic, or hymns, etc., use songs of his/her favorite artist. Popular music from the decade of their twenties will most often elicit a response. Depending on their level of cognition, singing a song (audio input) while holding their hand (tactile input) and making close eye contact (visual input) may produce a response. (Repetition might be necessary because of delayed cognitive processing). However, if your loved one is able to sing, then the perfect time to ask if anything is needed is immediately after the song, ie: "Are you hungry/thirsty? Are you cold/warm? Does anything hurt?" - All helpful questions to obtain information that if communicated, can add to their level of comfort. You may in turn find that your loved one's verbal ability increases for an extended period of time after singing.
- **For Reality Orientation:** Use recordings of their favorite music to orientate your loved one to time of day, transporting, and activities of daily living. Structure is very helpful as cognition declines. Recordings of morning and breakfast songs to start each day; songs about food when eating; songs about water when bathing; songs about walking/marching/dancing to exercise or to move from one place to another; and finally, songs about evening and bedtime for relaxation and comfort.

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- **For Memory Recall:** Utilize old pictures with associated songs to begin conversations (Visual/audio input). Reminiscence contributes to life satisfaction and intimacy.

- **For Improved Mood / Emotional Expression:** Music can be used to redirect difficult behaviors and to allow for feelings to be addressed.

- **For Relaxation/Pain management:** Instrumental recordings of soft and slow, rhythmic songs to focus on can be helpful to decrease agitation, anxiety, stress and insomnia.

- In addition to providing mental stimulation, all of the above serve as a means to combat social isolation and withdrawal as well as provide opportunities for spiritual support, if desired. It is our hope that the information provided here about the use of music in memory care can be of some assistance to those in both private and professional caregiving roles. Please feel free to contact Karen Blomgren, MT-BC, NMT at Mary T. Hospice for more information, as well as for specific questions concerning your loved one. Call Karen at 763-760-3519.