CultureCase

Playing music and singing can help your immune system

This research was conducted by **Dawn Kuhn** at **Williamette University, USA**

Summary

This paper reports a study which tested whether or not musical activity supports the immune system. The research found that playing music or singing has a much greater effect on supporting the immune system than simply listening to live music, or doing nothing musical at all.

They contrasted active, passive and no participation in musical activities

They took 33 healthy undergraduate students at Williamette University in Oregon and split them into three groups of 11. One group participated in a 30 minute drumming session, played tone bar instruments and sang, the second listened to a live music performance for 30 minutes and the third did neither but spent 30 minutes together under experimental conditions (they were forbidden from doing anything musical for this time – even humming was not allowed!). The third group therefore acted as a control group in the study.

All 33 students were given mouth swabs before and after the experiment

The researchers looked for a specific chemical in the saliva of the research subjects (Salivary Immunoglobin A, which is shortened to SIgA in the medical literature). SIgA is critical for defending the body against the common cold, cough, tonsillitis etc. They also wanted to test whether it made any difference whether the activity was ‘passive’ or ‘active’. They found that the ‘active’ group had significantly increased levels of SIgA after the experiment than both the ‘passive’ and the control groups.

Perhaps the type of music played made a difference?

The activity was made relatively easy to be rhythmical and harmonious. The authors ponder whether perhaps the response wasn't to do with the music but the sense of competence and achievement that produced the effect, or even the physical activity necessary for playing music. The researchers advise that this study be replicated with larger and more representative samples to answer these questions.

Keywords

playing **drumming** **health** **USA** **live** **singing** **immune** **music** **experiment** **active** **listening** **passive**

Title	The effects of active and passive participation in musical activity on the immune system as measured by salivary immunoglobulin A (SigA)
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