

Music activities benefit dementia patients and their carers

[Home](#) > [Impacts](#) > [Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture](#)

This research was conducted by **Teppo Särkämö and six others** at **universities in Finland and the USA**

Summary

Dementia is increasing worldwide, and with it the demand for low-cost and effective interventions to address both the symptoms and the reduced quality of life associated with the condition. This Finnish study showed music activities (both singing and listening to music) to have positive impacts on brain function and mood in people with dementia, and on quality of life in their carers.

Listening to music and singing have slightly different effects

A total of 74 people with dementia, each with a care-giver, took part in the nine-month study, with participants receiving standard care or attending a ten-week programme of weekly singing or music listening classes. Care-givers from the music groups were encouraged to incorporate music listening or singing into the daily routine of the person living with dementia. A detailed set of cognitive, mood and quality-of-life assessments was performed at baseline, on completion of the music programmes, and again six months later.

Participants in both music intervention groups showed short-term improvements in mood, with the music listening group having longer-lasting improvements in quality of life. Singing, however, was more beneficial for care-givers' quality of life and was associated with an additional memory improvement in people with dementia. Mood, memory and quality-of-life improvements were greatest in those who undertook more of the music activity within their home environments.

Music is beneficial and easy to implement

The researchers speculate that the music activities may activate new or under-used brain pathways, or work by stimulating the secretion of important chemicals that increase nerve activity and growth. Regardless of the mechanism, the researchers emphasise that singing and music listening could be used as a low cost and effective tool for improving mood and cognitive function in people with dementia and their families.

This summary is by **Vicky MacBean, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

music experiment dementia Finland

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