



## Music Therapy and Parkinson's Disease

---

### What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is an evidence-based allied health service similar to physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology that uses music as the therapeutic tool to address physical, cognitive, social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and/or behavioral needs.

### Why is Music Therapy So Effective with Parkinson's Disease?

The body and brain naturally respond to music and it is motivating. Therefore, music therapy often results in positive responses when other methods fail. Music is processed in both hemispheres of the brain, where different musical components activate different parts within the brain. When there is damage to the brain, music therapists can “cross-reference” and re-access information, or retrain the brain by activating alternate neural pathways and engaging multiple parts of the brain. When a steady beat is involved it recruits motor neurons so that muscles work more effectively and accurately, and clients do not fatigue as fast or experience as much pain so can push harder, are not as sore, and do not need as much recovery time. Singing provides an outstanding way to strengthen the same muscles used for speech and swallowing. Studies have found that singing in music therapy sessions can decrease or delay problems with swallowing. It can also improve voice volume, clarity, range, and fullness; all of which are often problems for people with Parkinson's.

### How Do I Know if Someone is Qualified to Provide Music Therapy Services?

- Qualified music therapists carry the credential **MT-BC** indicating that they have passed the national, independent certification board exam and have maintained awareness of current practice through continuing education or retesting. Board certification status can be confirmed at: <http://www.cbmt.org/>
- Music therapists may carry the designation of NMT, which refers to a specific form of music therapy, Neurologic Music Therapy, that is based on the scientific method, is strongly evidence-based, and requires additional training. NMT Fellow indicates that the music therapist has successfully passed advanced training and peer review of NMT techniques. For the optimal benefit to clients with Parkinson's disease, they should work with music therapists who work within the NMT model.



Music therapy can be particularly helpful in addressing the many complex issues for people with Parkinson's disease. Clients are treated through a holistic approach often addressing physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual needs within the same session. Some benefits of music therapy could include:

### **Physical**

- Improve posture which can decrease pain, tension, and isolation; and improve balance, gait, speech, and eating
- Increase strength and endurance with a decrease in fatigue and recovery time
- Improve or maintain physical abilities
- Decrease resting tremor
- Decrease fatigue
- Increase range of motion and flexibility
- Improve circulation
- Improve walking addressing: initiation of movement, freezing, step length, and transitioning between surfaces
- Decrease pain, tension, and discomfort
- Increase comfort/relaxation

### **Cognitive and Speech**

- Improve or maintain breath support, voice volume, clarity, articulation, and rate of speech
- Heighten cognitive ability
- Facilitate reminiscence and life review
- Improve expressive communication
- Increase sensory stimulation

### **Emotional, Spiritual, and Psychosocial**

- Improve mood and affect
- Provide emotional and spiritual support
- Structure social interactions and decrease isolation
- Increase opportunities for personal choice
- Decrease fear, stress, and anxiety
- Increase interest, esteem, and coping ability
- Increase self-expression
- Increase satisfaction with life
- Increase sense of belonging
- Enhance self-identity
- Increase awareness of self and others
- Increase frequency of successful experiences