

Firing up your iPod can actually improve your health.



## Sound it out

You might instinctively choose to sniffle to sappy '70s ballads when you're down or blast hard rock to rev you up for an afternoon of housecleaning, but music's effects could be more powerful than you think. Tunes don't just alter your mood, they can also affect your ability to learn and heal.

Music activates the "pleasure center" of the human brain, says Laurel Trainor, Ph.D., director of the McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The ebb and flow of music's rhythms and tones activates the same area of the brain that responds to sex, drugs and good food, which means music has a similar ability to relax and stimulate you. Need more proof of music's power?

► **It makes you smarter** Music lessons can boost language and speech skills, memory and attention span, according to research by Northwestern University in Illinois, which noted the long-term effects of childhood music lessons and the way musicians can more easily pick up a new language. And it might sound counterintuitive, but blasting that Metallica album for a few minutes before buckling down may help you learn: Listening to a fast-paced song you enjoy makes you more alert—at least for a little while. "It's only a temporary effect," Trainor says.

► **It helps you heal** Many hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, senior centers and hospice programs routinely employ music therapists, according to the American Music Therapy Program ([musictherapy.org](http://musictherapy.org)). A study published in the *Cochrane Review* in 2010 found that people recovering from a stroke were able to walk stronger and longer when they listened to music during physical therapy sessions. And patients who listened to Mozart sonatas had reduced blood pressure and heart rates and subsequently much less need for sedatives, according to a study in *The Medscape Journal of Medicine*.

► **It prompts relaxation** Unwind after a stressful day by listening to slow songs with downward-falling tones and gentle rhythms, Trainor says. Simple tones have traditionally been used as a kind of sound therapy to quell anxiety.

### Price points

Think acupuncture is too expensive? Pop into one of more than 160 community acupuncture clinics that have sprung up nationwide in the past five years. Each clinic's trained acupuncturists offer pain, health and stress relief in a group setting, rather than in private rooms, and on a sliding scale (\$15 to \$40 per treatment). "The sliding scale makes acupuncture financially accessible, so you can receive it often enough to be clinically effective," says Jessica Feltz, L.Ac., president of the Community Acupuncture Network ([communityacupuncturenetwork.org](http://communityacupuncturenetwork.org)).

### Seeing green

Green tea decreases dementia and cancer risks, according to a new study from Newcastle University in England. This summer, brew green tea according to package instructions, then freeze the tea in an ice cube tray. Use the cubes to cool down hot tea (without diluting) or throw a few into a fruit smoothie.

