



Listen Up



It used to irritate me when I saw people exercise while wearing headphones.

Runners outside would be missing the beauty of the natural environment. In the gym, where there was already music, exercisers wearing headphones seemed to distance themselves from other members - “I’m working out so don’t bother me”.

Apparently, I was misguided.

Recently, a group of Finnish and US researchers showed that self-selected music, delivered through headphones, enables exercisers to go farther without feeling that they are pushing themselves harder (1). Twenty nine male and female recreational athletes completed 2 counter-balanced sessions of cycling to exhaustion on stationary bikes - once with no music and once with self-selected music. When the participants cycled with self-selected music they cycled longer before reaching exhaustion. In addition, their cardiovascular load was higher, their total energy expenditure was higher and they cycled longer at suprathreshold (anaerobic) efforts. The authors suggest that this effect may be

due to music's "engagement of the mesolimbic reward circuitry of the brain" or that it may divert attention away from the discomfort associated with exhausting exercise.



Resistance training also shows a benefit to listening to self-selected music. For example, a study of college men performing the squat jump showed that velocity and force development were enhanced by self-selected music while the rating of perceived exertion was lower (2).



A related study showed that athletes who listened to preferred music during warm-ups performed more bench press repetitions to failure and had higher motivation to exercise than when they heard non-preferred music during their warm-ups (3). The authors conclude:

"These findings suggest that competitors listening to warm-up music before giving maximal effort during resistance exercise could optimize performance by ensuring self-selection of their own preferred music."

Nearly all of the research I found on this topic focused on young people, under 50 years old, pushing themselves to the limit while listening to their preferred music through headphones. But what about older adults, like us, who don't do squat jumps or bench presses and would rather not wear headphones while exercising?

According to South Shore Health, a Harvard affiliated health care provider, there are three ways music can help seniors during exercise - headphones not required. They found that seniors who exercise to music in groups have

improved balance along with increased socialization and communication that promotes a positive state of mind and relaxes the body (4)

In a review of 18 studies, using dance as the form of exercise, researchers found physical and cognitive beneficial effects for seniors aged 52-87 (5). They used ballroom and contemporary dance forms mostly but also included cultural, pop and jazz dancing. The authors conclude that:

“... dance, regardless of its style, can significantly improve muscular strength and endurance, balance, and other aspects of functional fitness in older adults.”



Thankfully, the same is true for frail seniors. In a systematic review of 21 studies researchers found beneficial effects of exercise and music on measures of fitness and depression with frail seniors (7). The authors conclude:

“Exercise with music may help improve frail older adults’ physical and emotional health and potentially reduce the burden of frailty.”

The evidence is clear, exercise works for all ages and music helps us exercise better and derive greater physical and psychological benefits.



Let's Get Moving!

1. Danso, A., et al, (2026) Feel the Beat not the Burn, *Psychology of Sport & Exercise* 85,103116
2. Biagini, M. (2012). Effects of self-selected music on strength, explosiveness, and mood. *J Strength Cond Res.* 2012, 26(7):1934-8
3. Ballmann, C., (2020). Effects of Preferred and Non-Preferred Warm-Up Music on Resistance Exercise Performance. *J Funct Morphol Kinesiol.* 31;6(1):3
4. Logan, J., (2017) Three Benefits Seniors Experience When Exercising to Music. South Shore Health website
5. Hwang, P. and Braun, K. (2015). The Effectiveness of Dance Interventions to Improve Older Adults' Health: A Systematic Literature Review. *Altern Ther Health Med.* 2015 ; 21(5): 64–70
6. Sadjapong, U., et al. (2020). Multicomponent Exercise Program Reduces Frailty and Inflammatory Biomarkers and Improves Physical Performance in Community-Dwelling Older Adults: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17(11), 3760
7. Kim, G. (2025). Effects of exercise with music in frail older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Open*, Apr 30;15(4)

Fun Fact:
Students Should Wear Headphones Too



According to a study recently published in the journal *Medicine*, medical students who wore sound cancelling headphones while studying reported “*higher concentration levels and improved learning outcomes.*” (1)

The reason that listening to music through headphones works for exercise is the same reason that listening to music through headphones does NOT work for studying - it's distracting!

1. Alshaikh, A. (2025) The association between headphones use during study and concentration among medical students at King Khalid University A cross-sectional study. *Medicine*. 104:8

Personal Note: Senior Games



The most important reason that I want to stay fit as I age is to be able to be active with my grandchildren. Last year it became clear that I couldn't keep up with my granddaughter, Sammy (above). With that in mind, I decided to add running to my training routine. At first it seemed to be going well. Then I began to plateau and I started to lose interest.

One of the best ways to improve your motivation and performance is to give yourself a goal. So, I signed up to compete in the Massachusetts Senior Games in the 50 meter and 100 meter sprints. That gave me new focus and purpose. The race date is coming up on June 14. Stay tuned. I will let you know how it goes!

Let's Get Moving!

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