

# Get into the rhythm

with  
music  
exploration



Dr. Concetta Tomaino, D.A., is internationally known for her research in the clinical applications of music and neurologic rehabilitation. As the executive director and co-founder of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function and senior vice president of music therapy services at CenterLight Health System, she has helped people use music to cope with physical, psychological and cognitive conditions. She holds a doctor of arts degree in music therapy from New York University.

We spoke to her about the potential benefits of music therapy.

## HOW DOES MUSIC THERAPY WORK?

A person doesn't have to be musical to participate in music therapy, says Dr. Tomaino. In addition to other, more traditional therapies, such as occupational or physical therapies, music therapy can be used to help with certain challenges, like stress management, according to Dr. Tomaino. Typically, a music therapist might use improvised music during the first session to learn more about someone and assess possible challenges. In group music therapy sessions, participants talk about their issues and engage in music-based exercises that reinforce techniques and enhance wellness.

## HOW MIGHT MUSIC THERAPY BENEFIT PEOPLE WITH MS?

According to Dr. Tomaino, the prescriptive use of music therapy offers potential benefits to people living with MS.

**Movement:** Music with a distinct rhythmic beat may help people with MS by getting them moving. As with learning and repeating a dance move to a musical rhythm, listening to a distinctive beat can stimulate the brain, which causes a response that gets the body moving.

**Stress:** For those people coping with stress, music therapists will work with them to find music that helps calm them—such as music with a certain rhythmic pattern—and then train them to use this music when they feel stressed. Music therapists can also give people the tools they need to associate certain music with feelings of self-confidence.

**Emotional expression:** A music therapist will use improvisation—from drumming to adaptive keyboards—to help people with MS express feelings, such as anxiety, fear or anger, nonverbally and deal with them therapeutically.



## HOW DO YOU FIND A MUSIC THERAPIST?

Dr. Tomaino recommends the following organizations and online directories:

- The American Music Therapy Association [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org)
- The Certification Board for Music Therapists [www.cbmt.org](http://www.cbmt.org)
- The Academy of Neurologic Music Therapists [www.colostate.edu/dept/cbrm/academyregistry03.htm](http://www.colostate.edu/dept/cbrm/academyregistry03.htm)
- Institute for Music and Neurologic Function [www.imnf.org](http://www.imnf.org)

## WHAT IF YOU CAN'T ACCESS OR AFFORD MUSIC THERAPY?

Dr. Tomaino suggests:

- use your favorite music to help you move: create playlists for different activities, such as relaxation, walking, exercise, etc.
- find out whether or not your insurance company will cover some of the cost of music therapy
- consider group therapy, which can be more affordable

## HOW CAN CAREGIVERS HELP WITH MUSIC THERAPY?

Loved ones and caregivers of people with MS can also explore music therapy resources in their community. Says Dr. Tomaino, music therapy groups are often open to caregivers as well, and “some caregivers may actually find that music can help them with their own wellness and stress.” People with MS and their loved ones “should share music in a way that helps their relationships and at times when they feel most stressed.”

## ENGAGING IN HORTICULTURAL EXPLORATION: GARDENING TIPS

Gardening may offer potential benefits, including stress relief and exercise. Here are some tips to consider as you get started:

- ▶ Choose a garden suited to your ability and lifestyle
- ▶ Create wide paths
- ▶ Use raised planters and beds for easier access
- ▶ Use knee pads, stools, long-handled garden tools and small carts
- ▶ Consider a shaded garden to avoid the sun and heat

