



# CHOOSING MUSIC BY JULIANNA HOLDEN LMP, NCTMB

## *with the power to heal*

**MUSIC HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A POWERFUL HEALING TOOL.** Coupled with massage, it can render amazing effects on one's physical well-being. Hospitals, clinics, schools and retirement homes throughout the world are discovering the healing effects of music therapy. For example, in medicine, music is used with patients with Alzheimer's disease, cancer, stroke recovery, as well as other diseases. In psychiatry, music is used for depression and other states of mental health, while in education, music is used for brain development, cognitive increase, speech, and reading improvement.

Much of the research is inconclusive as to how or why music affects humans, and the type of music played is also subjective. In general, findings seem to suggest that music played at about one beat per second, with low tones and little or no percussion or brass is most effective in reducing cortisol—the "stress hormone"—levels in the blood.<sup>1</sup> Some studies have found that even when a person reports no change in mood from listening to music, the music still has an effect on cortisol levels.<sup>2</sup>

*Music is one of the most powerful tools for changing brain chemistry. It alters our chemistry instantly, with no known negative side effects. If chosen well, music can be medicine for the mind and soul.*

—DR. JOEL ROBERTSON SAID IN HIS BOOK, *NATURAL PROZAC* (HARPERCOLLINS, 1998),

#### DEFINING A MUSIC GOAL FOR MASSAGE

There's a time and place for everything. Massage is a time to leave some of our own personal preferences aside. Think about what effect the music will have on the client. Music should not distract from what one is trying to accomplish, but should enhance the entire massage session.

It's important to define what you are trying to achieve in the selection of music, since everyone's taste is different. So ask yourself, what effect do I wish to achieve? Who is my audience? How might the music I currently play effect my client? Since there are different types of massage, the focus here will be choosing music for relaxation massage, the goal being calming music.

When looking for music, I try to find music that alters brain wave activity, principally alpha waves and theta brain waves. Alpha state activates the parasympathetic nervous system<sup>2</sup> (rest and digest). A few of the many benefits of alpha state are reduction in cortisol, slowed breathing and heartbeat, and endorphin production that promotes relaxation and pain reduction.<sup>3</sup> Theta state balances potassium/sodium ratios in the body, causing mental refreshment.<sup>4</sup> Some artists advertise when their music induces alpha or theta brain wave activity.

#### SELECTING MUSIC

Like many of us, I've wasted a good bit of money on music that sounded wonderful by the description but turned out quite disappointing. It's a good idea to find a source to listen to samples of music before purchasing. Many websites contain sound clips. Some bookstores also have listening stations.

When choosing music, try to avoid overly rhythmic, lyrical or melodic music—it can be stimulating to want to keep rhythm, hum or sing a tune. Music that contains lyrics or rhythms of sexuality, love, companionship, sentimentality, too much emotion or

spirituality (even in a foreign language) could have the potential to offend or give the wrong message.

Your music choice should also sound inviting without overpowering the environment. It should be a homeopathic approach where less is more and where it subtly greets and supports your clients. An atmosphere is created when music fits with the surroundings.

There can be savings in downloading entire albums on the Internet for a reduced fee. A few good, alternative websites are [www.heartspring.net](http://www.heartspring.net), [www.whiteswanmusic.com](http://www.whiteswanmusic.com), [www.detachingtheworld.com](http://www.detachingtheworld.com) and [www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com). Heartspring, in particular, has some wonderful audio streams of ambient meditation music. With just a computer and speakers, one could use that music during massage for free. Cdbaby has an almost endless array of off-label artists. Have fun exploring your own finds!

In a stimulating world that we live in, it's wonderful we have such a powerful tool as music. Choosing the most beneficial music can not only help draw a repeat client; it can help people heal.

#### REFERENCES

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