

# Can music help someone with Alzheimer's disease?

November 7 2022, by Laurel Kelly

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Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disorder that causes brain cells to waste away and die. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of

dementia, which is a term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking and social abilities severely enough to interfere with daily function.

As many as 5.8 million people in the U.S. were living with Alzheimer's disease in 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And this number is projected to nearly triple to 14 million people by 2060.

Memory loss is the key symptom of Alzheimer's disease. An early sign of the disease is difficulty remembering recent events or conversations. As the disease progresses, [memory impairment](#) persists and worsens, affecting the ability to function at work or at home.

Musical memories often are preserved in Alzheimer's disease, though, because key brain areas linked to musical memory are relatively undamaged by the disease. Research suggests that listening to or singing songs can provide emotional and behavioral benefits for people with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia.

Music also can benefit caregivers by reducing anxiety and distress, lightening the [mood](#), and providing a way to connect with loved ones who have Alzheimer's disease—especially those who have difficulty communicating.

If you'd like to use music to help a loved one who has Alzheimer's disease, consider these tips:

- Think about your loved one's preferences. What kind of music does your loved one enjoy? What music evokes memories of happy times in his or her life? Involve family and friends by asking them to suggest songs or make playlists.
- Set the mood. To calm your loved one during mealtime or a

morning hygiene routine, play music or sing a song that's soothing. When you'd like to boost your loved one's mood, use more upbeat or faster-paced music.

- Avoid overstimulation. When playing music, eliminate competing noises. Turn off the TV. Shut the door. Set the volume based on your loved one's hearing ability. Choose music that isn't interrupted by commercials, which can cause confusion.
- Encourage movement. Help your loved one to clap along or tap his or her feet to the beat. If possible, consider dancing with your loved one.
- Sing along. Singing along to music together with your loved one can boost the mood and enhance your relationship. Some [early studies](#) also suggest musical memory functions differently than other types of [memory](#), and singing can help stimulate unique memories.
- Pay attention to your loved one's response. If your loved one seems to enjoy particular songs, play them often. If your loved one reacts negatively to a particular song or type of music, choose something else.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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