SUM:

Strategic Use of Music

The care of adults suffering with dementia is a growing societal concern and has been acknowledged as a public health challenge. Primary caregivers, usually family members, are often stressed and overwhelmed with their caregiving responsibilities. While online and in-person support groups, self-care recommendations, and occasional respite care are useful, these approaches do not provide practical techniques for coping with the daily realities of caregiver needs. *The SUM pilot study established that music, implemented strategically by caregivers, can successfully lessen difficult patient behaviors and ease the burden of care.*

The SUM pilot study designed by researchers from Hofstra University and NYU Winthrop Geriatric Medicine Associates explored caregiver use of music with dementia patients as a tool to encourage patient cooperation with activities of daily living and during difficult times of day. Participant caregivers in the SUM study found that using a personalized music playlist with loved ones was very beneficial with a reduction of stress level by 3 points on a 5 point scale.

Patient agitation and resistance, which in some individuals may be a result of dementia progression, can have a negative impact on the caregiver's overall wellbeing. There is substantial research that indicates many dementia patients respond positively to music, especially when selected to meet their preferences. Music appears to tap old memories, improve mood and enhance a sense of wellbeing. *In many patients, the positive impact of music can be used to reduce difficult behaviors and encourage desirable engagement.*

Caregivers found the use of music most helpful during transitional times of the day, car rides and meal times.

GETTING STARTED IS EASY!

You will need:

- A music device: ideally an MP3 player and a pair if headphones.
- A personalized music list -- songs that will resonate for the dementia patient.
- A plan to use the music during activities or times of day that are challenging.

NOTES:

- Over the ear headphones seem to be the most comfortable for older adults. Be sure the headphones you use are not too tight.
- Using headphones seems to block out distractions and allows the user to become immersed in the experience of the music.

When you begin:

- Decide when you will use the music and explain to the patient you are going to play music prior to putting on the earphones. Do this while you are both calm.
- Observe the patient's reaction and perhaps sit with them for a few minutes while they get used to the experience.
- Do not use the music for more than 15-20 minutes at a time.

NOTES:

- If the headphones are left on the patient for more than 15-20 minutes the positive effect of the music may become diminished/the patient may become agitated.
- Experiment about the most effective use of music for you – when is the patient most responsive and when will it be most beneficial for you.

Create the playlist:

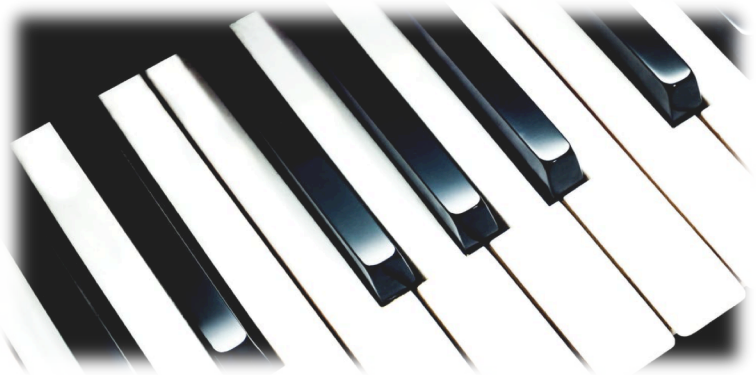
- Think about the kind of music the patient likes or that you may have enjoyed together.

- Songs from the patient's youth and when they were cognitively stronger may be effective.

- Think about these questions when creating a play list:

  - Was the patient a fan of a particular group or singer?
  - Did the patient love a movie or television theme song?
  - Did the patient like to sing in the shower or during car trips?
  - Is there music that you used to enjoy together?

- Observe the patient's reaction to the music – some songs may be soothing, others may be energizing, while a song may also provoke happiness or sad memories. Adjust the playlist accordingly.



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Music and Memory, a non-profit organization, a pioneer in the use of music for dementia patients, has guideline for helping develop personalized music playlists: www.musicandmemory.org.

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