



Music, Memory and Reminiscence The Heart of Silver Memories

What the Science tells us

Music that elicits positive memories from the past can have a soothing effect and these positive feelings, in turn, will prevent or reduce agitation in older people with dementia.

Gerdner 2000

Familiar music from the past can assist in memory recall and elicit memories associated with positive feelings. Researchers indicate that the areas of the brain that respond to music are the last to deteriorate in dementia and suggested that music may be one form of communication that remains preserved in people with dementia who respond to music.

Crystal et al 1989

Music listening activates a widespread bilateral network of brain regions related to attention, semantic processing, memory, motor functions and emotional processing.

Sarkamo et al 2008

Although older people with dementia have impaired explicit memory, they have preserved implicit memory and habits. One form of implicit memory is associated with the sense of familiarity. Older people with dementia may invoke memories encoded with familiar environmental cues, which the elders may perceive as less intimidating and stressful. Since older people with dementia are typically unable to learn or interpret a new environment, introducing a sense of familiarity into a new environment or maximising familiarity in an existing environment can enhance their functional abilities. Using aspects of prior familiar environments, such as music, objects and pictures, can be a viable strategy to stimulate remote memories associated with positive feelings in older people with dementia.

Camberg et al 1999

Son et al 2002

Older people are usually fond of music that was popular during their youth.

Gibbons 2000

Music can be used to modify environmental stimuli and some types of music may create a neutral environment to mask noises and prevent over-stimulation. Therefore use of music can be a viable intervention to manage agitated behaviours in older people with dementia.

Hall & Buckwater 1987

Gerdner & Buckwater 1999

Music is often used as a stimulus and a catalyst for reminiscence for older people and may be used to communicate forgotten memories in those with dementia.

Clair 1996

