Study: Music Is as Good as Massage in Easing Anxieties

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Listening to soft music while relaxing is as effective at reducing anxiety as getting a massage—and it's more affordable, according to a study published in Depression and Anxiety.

For the Group Health Research Institute's study, 68 anxiety patients received one of three treatments consisting of 10 one-hour sessions: massages, deep breathing exercises while lying down or thermotherapy (having their arms and legs wrapped with heated pads and towels). All three treatments included relaxing music.

The results? Patients who had the series of massages experienced 50 percent less anxiety symptoms three months later, but those who lay down and listened to enjoyable music experienced the same decrease in symptoms—as did the thermotherapy participants.

"We were surprised to find that the benefits of massage were no greater than those of the same number of sessions of thermotherapy or listening to relaxing music," said Karen J. Sherman, PhD, MPH, a senior researcher. "This suggests that the benefits of massage may be due to a generalized relaxation response."

Sherman pointed out that practicing simple relaxation techniques while listening to calming music is much less expensive than massage or thermotherapy, "so it might be the most cost-effective option for people with generalized anxiety disorder who want to try a relaxation-oriented complementary medicine therapy."

Read how regular exercise can also reduce anxiety here.

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