

Music, Emotions

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The stress factor

Stress is a daily occurrence in our lives. It is this one thing that you cannot avoid, it is recurring and which makes it harder to deal with in our daily lives. Though stress has no clinical solutions, there are many therapies making it something we can solve ourselves. Researchers and psychologists define stress as the way humans deal with different changes both physically and mentally. Stress is experienced in different ways by others for different reasons in different events. Psychologists hypothesize that it is mainly based on the person's perception of the event or situation.

There are many types of stress, and it is faced differently by others, but has been categorized into two types: **distress and eustress**.

Distress is the more common type of stress faced by all, this includes the feeling of being overwhelmed, oppressed, or out of control. The feeling of complete helplessness, and anxiety can prove to be one of the many factors for people to take extreme measures, just to solve an issue. Stress can be faced through many different problems and there are multiple symptoms of distress as well like *headaches, anxiety, hypertension, and sleep disturbances*.

Distress is mainly caused by major life changes, work-related pressures, financial problems, and relationship conflicts. Under all that, there are many common issues like health issues, family responsibilities and daily hassles like being too busy.

- Major Life Changes:
 - Major life changes include personal problems and family issues like the death of a loved one, marriage, or a family illness. Work and school life can also create major life changes like starting a new job, getting laid off, or dealing with deadlines and difficult colleagues. Lastly, other major events like moving to a new home, an injury, or experiencing a traumatic event.
 - Work-related pressures:
 - These pressures can occur mainly for the young adult age group. Mainly adults aged 20 and above. This is because, at this age people would be going to work, and experiencing job and work-related pressures leading to distress. Especially dealing with deadlines, or difficult colleagues. Other issues like financial problems meaning worrying about money, debt, or unexpected bills.
 - Relationships:
 - Relationships, though a very sweet part of life, can also cause a lot of stress. This could include ending a significant relationship due to personal issues and also taking the role of a caregiver to others. All of these could cause potential stress leading to many problems in our lives.
 - Daily hassles:
 - Daily hassles can include effects of small annoyances like traffic jams or minor conflicts that can lead to stress. It can also mean having a busy schedule, including pressure at school or work, etc. Lastly, lifestyle choices can also include not having enough sleep, and not being able to manage time and commitments.

Eustress is mainly the positive perception of an event or situation which lies in the stressor, and whether there are sufficient resources available to handle the situation. For example, the same event could cause distress or eustress based on the person. Like an exam, it may cause distress for a student that stayed up all night scrolling and it may cause eustress for a student that studied hard, and came prepared. It changes per person and perception. Symptoms caused by eustress can sometimes mimic the symptoms of distress, and this is normal and misleading. Some examples of Eustress are:

- In life situations this could mean getting married, moving to a new home, or retiring (this tends to be in the later stages of life). In many cases, work plays an important role in eustress. This includes receiving promotions, salary increases, and equal roles in projects.
- Another example could be personal challenges like exercising or training for a marathon, learning a new skill or hobby, or working on a fulfilling project. Eustress can also be gained through exciting experiences like riding a roller coaster, performing a talent in front of an audience, or traveling to a new place.

Though there is a distinct difference between eustress and distress, it only lies between each individual's perception and control over the stressor. If the situation is seen as a manageable challenge, with any sort of desired outcome, it is eustress. If it is perceived as an unmanageable challenge with an overwhelming pressure, then it becomes distress. This leads to negative feelings like anxiety, frustration, and a potential decline in human health and performance.

In our world, there are many modern stress factors including academic and career pressures, financial concerns, social media comparisons, and anxieties about many global issues like climate change and pandemics. In regard to academic and career pressure, there are many factors that many people face in their daily lives.

This includes high expectations from parents and schools for academic success and performance on exams, as well as an uncertainty about future career prospects due to a rapidly changing job market, and the newly advanced technology. Balancing academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities and work is very important as it involves setting priorities and allocating enough time to finish all the tasks related to academics and extracurriculars.

The social and psychological factors include the main problem, social media. Exposure to unrealistic standards and a constant comparison with peers can lead to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. Other factors include peer relationships and body image, which is basically the pressure to conform to a certain physical ideal related to appearance, fitness, etc. Another aspect of youth stress factors revolves around financial and environmental concerns like financial instability, global issues, and family dynamics including stress from family conflicts, economic hardships, or changes within

homes. This brings us to the next point, lifestyle and time management. This factor is the most popular among young adults in this generation including lack of free time, poor sleep due to busy schedules, extra screen time and a lack of physical activity linked to lower mental well-being.

Now, discuss the types of stress. In the above paragraphs, **distress and eustress** has already been discussed, but under those there are many sub-types allocated by scientists, psychologists, and therapists.

- Acute stress:
- Acute stress is a short-term stress often caused from immediate stressors, from specific events. This often causes physiological changes, like an increase in the heart rate. There is also something called acute stress disorder (ASD)
- , this is a more psychological response to a traumatic event that might've happened in the past or recently. This can last for several months and has many symptoms including intrusive memories, avoidance, dissociation, and isolation.
- Episodic stress:
- Episodic stress is when acute stress occurs more frequently, rather than constantly. It is mainly caused by specific short events that happen with regularity, for example frequent deadlines, or conflicts among friends. This is very common for people with busy schedules and chaotic routines. Though episodic stress stops, it can occur very frequently leading to the same symptoms.

Example: A case study that can help you understand the impact of stress:

An overwhelmed employee:

An individual who is working in a firm on a project that overworks them so much that they decide to contact the *Employee Wellness Programme* reporting high stress levels in a week. The employee is dealing with a divorce in their family, which has damaged their self-esteem and has disrupted their way of productivity. Along with that, the office has allotted the employee a project that requires them to work overtime and put in extra hours, when they aren't even able to put in hours for themselves.

The consequences of this stressor?

The employee experiences feelings of being unable to cope, leading to no sleep, and later on leading to thoughts on suicide.

The Psychology of Perception:

This brings us to the most important part of this section, *perception*. Perception is defined as the *process of organizing and interpreting sensory information to understand the world around you*. This understanding is influenced by factors such as personal experiences, and the context of a situation from different perspectives. Your perception can act as a memory in the context of eating home-cooked meals, this can evoke emotions of nostalgia.

Some of the key aspects of perception is:

- Perception is subjective. Everyone's perception is unique and can vary from person to person, even when experiencing the same event.
- Perception isn't just about what you see, it also involves internal processes and cognitive functions. For example, recognizing a familiar face, or smelling something familiar, reminding you of an event both positive or negative.
- Perception is crucial for daily life. It allows you to navigate safely like checking before crossing the street, or making sure the food is at the right temperature before eating. Perception allows you to take care of yourself.
- Perception can be distorted. Things like stereotypes, selective attention, and context can lead to biased or inaccurate perceptions, leading to conflicts among different age groups and generations.

Cognitive appraisal: Cognitive appraisal is defined as the process where individuals evaluate and interpret events or situations, forming a subjective understanding that influences their emotional and behavioral responses. *It suggests how emotions are not automatic but generated by how we evaluate a stimulus.*

This theory suggests that emotional and behavioral response to an event is the result of cognitive appraisal and not the event itself. It is crucial to understand that through this theory we can understand how we process stress and emotions. We can influence our emotional responses by changing how we appraise a situation.

There are primarily two stages: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.

- Primary appraisal:
- The initial evaluation of a situation to determine if it is relevant, and if so, whether it is beneficial, stressful, or threatening. For example, hearing about potential layoffs at work could trigger primary appraisal of the situation.
- Secondary appraisal:
- The assessment of personal resources and options to cope with the situation. For example, after the layoff announcement, you might appraise your job security and decide whether you could handle the potential fallout or if you need to panic, and talk to someone about it (venting).

Personality traits:

Many personality traits can affect stress levels by influencing how individuals perceive and cope with stressors, and their physiological reactions.

Neuroticism: It is a personality trait characterized by a tendency to experience negative emotions like anxiety, anger, and depression. It is also known as low emotional stability, or negative emotionally. This personality trait can increase stress, as people with high neuroticism tend to perceive situations as more stressful and may feel a lack of control. They are also prone to experiencing negative emotions like fear, or anger and can have a higher number of stressors.

Conscientiousness: It is the quality of wishing to do one's work or duty well and thoroughly. High conscientiousness is linked to fewer stressors, mainly because it promotes planning ahead, which can then lead to prevention of stressful situations.

Most commonly known as overthinking, in a way it seems to be helpful in being able to plan ahead.

Extraversion: A personality trait that can be characterized by an outgoing, energetic and sociable nature where individuals are energized by social interactions and external stimulation. People with this trait tend to be more talkative, assertive, and enthusiastic as they seek out social gatherings and human interaction.

Openness: It is the openness to experience and is a basic personality trait denoting receptivity to newer ideas and new experiences. High levels of openness are associated with fewer stressors, those who score high in openness tend to perceive stressful situations as less overwhelming.

Agreeableness: A personality trait characterized by being kind, cooperative, and sympathetic which reflects a person's tendency to be considerate of others. Individuals high in agreeableness are often seen as trusting, warm, empathetic, and people lower in this trait may be more competitive and skeptical.

Reflective thinking:

*Think about the last time you felt stressed, what triggered it?
Was it truly the event, or was it your reaction?*

Daily lives

Stress can negatively impact people's daily routines including their sleep schedules, physical health, and mental function which further makes it harder to focus, and maintain healthy habits. Chronic stress is a long-term response to stressors and triggers that last for weeks, if not months. Chronic stress can completely disrupt sleep patterns, which leads to fatigue and causes headaches and digestive issues.

Impacts on physical health:

- Sleep disruption:
- Stress can make it difficult to sleep, and will cause people to stay awake. This leads to a cycle where lack of sleep increases stress levels, making it harder for people to continue with their daily activities.
- Physical symptoms:
- These sorts of disruptions can cause headaches, muscle tension, high blood pressure, stomachaches, and other physical issues.
- Energy levels:
- Through stress, energy levels are also affected, creating constant fatigue, and racing heart rates. This can make it hard to engage in daily activities, including harder tasks like exercise.

There are also many mental and emotional impacts like cognitive impairment, which is long-term stress that can impact decision-making and memory skills. Mood is also directly affected by stress. Stress can lead to increased irritability, anxiety, and can later on lead to depression. This makes it harder for people when it comes to dealing with smaller frustrations or problems. Due to this change in mood, stress can start straining relationships with family members and friends. This is because, as you are still irritable and angry, it makes you less approachable. This is where coping mechanisms and mindfulness come into play, allowing you to be more mindful of your surroundings and thinking about others before reacting.

Stress also impacts habits and productivity in daily routines. For example, some people tend to overeat or have a loss of appetite when dealing with a stressful situation or in distress. This can later lead to a reduction in motivation as you may feel less inclined to engage in other activities, in which you would normally be excited and motivated to do on a daily basis. In the end, this just means that there is a decrease in overall productivity. The combination of messed up sleep schedules, physical inactivity, and mental strains which makes it harder to focus on tasks at school or work.

The invisible stress cycle:

The invisible stress cycle is a continuous loop where unnoticed stressors trigger a stress response in the body. It can start with an internal or external event that's appraised as a threat and this activates the body's stress response. This term can also mean the cycle of mental load put upon humans, where there are constant "to-do lists" in daily life,

keeping the stress response active.

Stages:

- Demand:
- An event whether internal or external acts as a trigger.
- Appraisal:
- The mind perceives this event as a threat, even if it isn't as dangerous as perceived.
- Activation:
- The body's stress response is activated, and this leads to a release in stress hormones.
- Action:
- An action is taken to deal with the stressor, this can include avoidance or relief-seeking behavior.
- Depletion:
- If the cycle isn't completed, the body and the mind remain in a state of tension which then tends to lead to chronic fatigue, anxiety, and other mental stresses.

Stress and the different stages of life:

Stress is experienced by different age groups in relation to the stages of life. Here is how each age group experiences stress, keep in mind, though everyone experiences stress differently it is also understood that there are different levels of intensity.

Teenagers and Students:

Teenagers and students experience different levels of stress through academic pressures, social challenges, and family issues, which can manifest in different changes including physical, emotional, and behavioral changes.

Sources of stress:

- Academic Pressure:
- This could include homework, assignments, group projects, etc. Noticeably, psychologists have identified that stress is only created when assignments or projects are timed or have deadlines. This makes it easier to understand the main factor or stressor.
- Family issues:
- Family issues could include conflicts at home, parental stress, and major life changes like shifting areas, changing regions, and joining new schools. Going through a parent separation can also be difficult, and can be a huge part of teenagers' lives and their stress.
- Lack of time and feeling overwhelmed:
- Dealing with different tasks and juggling multiple commitments tends to overwhelm children and can cause them to get stressed. The feeling of having too much to do, and feeling overwhelmed over the smallest of tasks can lead to the bottling of emotions.
- Social media:
- On social media, the pressure to maintain a certain online image, and engage with

social comparisons between different influencers can be a huge aspect that contributes to the factors of stress in teenagers' lives.

These factors can make teenagers and students show signs, and those signs of stress can be emotional changes, behavioral changes, physical symptoms, or behavioral signs.

Signs of Stress:

- Emotional and behavioral changes-
- An increase in irritability, panic, anxiety. More mood swings and a sudden withdrawal from friends and family, along with feelings of depression and sadness. There may also be changes in eating habits, like some people may eat less, or they could also eat more.
- Physical symptoms:
- An increase in headaches, or stomachaches, fatigue and teenagers may feel a lack of energy, as well frequent illnesses and reduced immunity.
- Behavioral signs:
- Teenagers and students could face trouble sleeping, or may also sleep for too long in hopes of "escaping" from the real world. They may also start being forgetful and may have a reduced sense of concentration towards daily tasks, including neglecting chores and hobbies.

How to balance stress:

Teenagers and students can focus on a combination of healthy habits like getting a proper amount of sleep, eating a well balanced meal following a proper diet. Keep in mind that a diet does **not** mean starvation. It can also mean a well balanced meal with a proper amount of vegetables, protein, carbohydrates, and a lot of nutrients. Using stress reducing techniques such as exercise, mindfulness, and time-management skills to organize their workload. It is also very important to build a support system by connecting with friends and family and to seek professional help if the stress becomes too overwhelming.

Young Adults:

Young adults tend to experience stress from factors like financial pressures, career uncertainty, and social expectations. To manage this, they can use coping mechanisms like maintaining a healthy lifestyle, practicing relaxation techniques, breaking down larger tasks into smaller tasks with longer timespans. There are many sources of stress that can vary from the other age groups in life.

Sources of stress:

- Financial instability:
- Due to high inflation and rising costs for housing and education can lead to a lot of financial stress which can then affect people's lifestyles. This is also included under salary uncertainty. When young adults aren't getting paid enough for their work and the amount of time they spend, they tend to get stressed leading to another factor of stress under financial instability.

- Career and job market:
- Uncertainty in the job market can be combined with the pressure of starting a career. This is a major source of stress for young adults as they are starting a new journey in their lives, and creating new paths for themselves and for their future.
- Academic and work pressures:
- Most young adults around the ages of 22–29 tend to work and pursue a PhD. While doing this, it may be hard for some people to focus on both, as they may have a hard time multitasking.

Strategies to reduce stress:

- Prioritize physical health:
- To maintain physical health, get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet, and avoid excess caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine is not completely bad for your health, but it can have negative effects in the body if overly consumed. For this reason, it is advised to reduce the amount of caffeine that you consume in a day. Maybe once a day, or thrice a week is better than 3 times a day for the whole week.
- Develop mental and emotional coping skills:
- Practicing relaxation techniques like meditation, and challenging negative thoughts with positive thoughts can help in coming up with solutions for even the most challenging of situations. Reframing goals that you may have set for yourself to “good enough” rather than perfection makes it easier for you to be able to achieve them successfully.
- Organize and plan:
- Breaking larger tasks into small steps helps in achieving them. Setting deadlines for yourself also sets a positive mindset for yourself. Instead of viewing the deadlines as a stressful situation, making it a positive solution helps in being able to achieve the task, maybe even before the deadline you set for yourself!
- Take breaks and maintain perspectives:
- Stepping away from stressful situations helps to recharge and helps you focus on what you can control. Making time for hobbies and activities, will help in de-stress and recharging completely allowing for flexibility in your schedule.

Many studies have shown young adults experience high levels of stress due to the factors discussed above. The main type of stress faced by this age group is chronic stress which can be dangerous to our physical and mental health weakening the immune system, affecting sleep, therefore affecting our overall mood.

Key findings from studies:

- High prevalence of mental health issues:
- Studies and research indicates that there is a high prevalence of anxiety, and depression among young adults. Some studies find that anxiety levels among young adults are higher than stress!
- Impact of chronic stress:
- Chronic stress can weaken the immune system and can affect the cognitive function, which leads to multiple physical health problems. This doesn't completely

show at the start, but can become problematic in the future.

- Age-related vulnerability:
- Through studies we can see that while older adults are more prone to stress related issues, young adults are at a greater risk of poor mental health outcomes. This means that, as stress is something that exists for people at such young ages, the problems associated with it tend to last longer, leading to a worse future.

Older Adults:

Older adults often face chronic illnesses, bereavement, social isolation, and sometimes financial instability. This can manifest physically and mentally which will lead to worsened health conditions, cognitive issues, and a reduced quality of life. In turn, all of these cause stress leading to an overall reduction in their quality of life.

Common stressors for older adults:

- Health and decline:
- Chronic illnesses and cognitive impairment are the main sources for stress in this age group. Stress itself can worsen these conditions placing the elderly in a much harder situation physically.
- Loss and bereavement:
- The loss of a spouse, or even living alone, might be one of the biggest factors of stress for the elderly.
- Social factors:
- Social isolation and loneliness are prevalent, financial worries are also another one of the major factors. The stress of the caregiver or other family members could also affect the older adults age group.

Physical and mental effects:

Stress like mentioned before, can cause headaches, sleep problems, fatigue, muscle tension, and digestive issues. This can be an even higher risk for the elderly as they may already have other issues due to their age factors. It can worsen chronic conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes, that are already existing in their bodies.

- Studies have also proven that chronic stress can reduce the effectiveness of vaccines. This is because it impaired the immune system's ability to take a strong antibody response. This causes the immune system in our body to be weak and less efficient at producing antibodies.
- Stress can also lead to anxiety, depression, and can increase the difficulty in concentration. Chronic stress among the older adults also negatively affects the memory and brain structures, making it more deadly for these people.

Society and Culture:

“Success” and “Productivity” vary significantly around the globe. This is primarily due to the societal values of *individualism* vs. *collectivism*. These cultural norms have influenced how success and productivity are defined, which impacts stress levels and mental well-being in positive ways.

Individualistic cultures: In these cultures, success is often defined by individual achievement and personal performance. Material wealth and personal ambition is what drives the people in this society. There is a strong emphasis on competition including long-hours of just pure work, as a marker of “worth”. The pressure to meet the “*high individual*” expectations is crucial and intense.

This can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. This is commonly known as “burnout”, and this happens when individuals *tie* their self-worth directly to their personal output.

Collectivistic cultures: Success in these cultures are often defined by collaboration and collaborative efforts taken for a group, social harmony, and fulfilling obligations to family and community. Here, the focus is on cooperation, loyalty, and collective goals. Though this leads to lower personal stress from individual failure, events that could threaten social harmony can create stressful situations for a whole group of people rather than one person.

In this culture, the source of stress is more socially modulated, support is usually implicit rather than explicit like other cultures.

Cultures that focus more on overwork and do not encourage a healthy work-life balance are strongly linked to chronic stress, burnouts, and poor mental health. On the other hand, a more supportive work environment and workplace culture, regardless of the overarching societal norms, makes it easier to mitigate stress among everyone. This is because there is clear communication, and a recognition of contributions, all of this contributes to opportunities for people to grow.

Ultimately, the pressure to be more culturally inclined and to follow defined ideals for productivity and success can be a major source of stress, especially when an individual’s personal values or needs for a work-life balance are at odds with the expectations of a specific culture or organization.

Technology and Modern Lifestyles:

Nowadays, technology has become an important part of our lives. It has helped us improve modern day communication, education, healthcare, and efficiency while also preventing challenges like potential negative impacts on mental health and privacy risks. Technology has enhanced work through remote and flexible options, enhanced access to information, and has transformed entertainment to a whole other level.

Though there are many positives to technology, psychologists have found many negatives that could potentially be of harm to us both physically and mentally. Now,

there are many mental health concerns as there is an increase in excessive screen time and social media use, which is linked to increased risks of anxiety all over the teenage population. As there is an over-reliance on digital communication, this can lead to a decrease in meaningful in-person interactions and conversations. Technology has also brought along a lot of privacy and security risks, as well as an increase in concern to technological misuse, cyberbullying, cyber harassment, and all of these can cause significant harm.

- Studies have shown that spending time off screens is better than utilizing technology for a longer period of time. It's better to go through a detox. This will help in significantly improving your mood, and physical health!

The dopamine cycle:

The dopamine cycle is a reward seeking system for our brain. It's where a stimulus triggers the release of dopamine, which is a "feel good" neurotransmitter, leading to feelings of pleasure that reinforces the behavior. Over time, repeated exposure to rewarding stimuli can cause the brain to adapt by lowering the natural dopamine levels in our brain. This just creates a cycle of craving for more intense stimulation to feel satisfied, this is a phenomenon known as the *dopamine crash loop*. When there isn't enough satisfaction or the dopamine cycle isn't being fulfilled, you tend to get stressed leading to even worse problems including addiction, and depression.

Now, as we have listed the different sources of stress in our daily lives. Let's reflect and move on to the next section, where it discusses the solution that I am proposing for this problem. I can assure you that this solution has been tested, and I personally believe that it is the best solution for such a huge issue.

Reflective thinking:

List all of your stress factors in your daily life.

Can you come up with solutions for every single one of them?

– Think, you'll find out. —

Music and it's magic

The creation of music started around 39,370 to 43,150 BCE. Music's origins are said to be unknown, but evidence dates to the Upper Paleolithic period. This confirmed with the discovery of bone flutes in Europe, suggesting that it was created by early modern humans. Many different events helped in the development and evolution of music. Events like the Renaissance brought in many innovations on the instrument side, leading to the influence of modern day music, including the global commercialization industry in the 20th century. There are many elements in music including the melody, the rhythm, harmony, dynamics and the timbre.

The melody of the tune is the main tune or the sequence of the pitches that form the musical tune involved in the song. Though there are many definitions for music, there's one common understanding. Music is an emotion. It can evoke various emotions, from happiness to sadness, to fear, to excitement, any emotion? You name it!

With this in mind, music is therapy. This has been a research topic conducted for the past 5 years. Through this research, scientists and researchers have been able to identify the amount of healing music can provide. More scientifically, the reason for this healing has been discovered as an increase in dopamine. The dopamine release brings our emotions to surface, as well as works as motivation for certain people. Music is said to bring people to their senses and motivate them to achieve their goals. These days there are many factors of stress in our day to day lives, and this will be discussed later on in this guide, but work, school, economic, and personal stresses that affect our emotions and mental health create stresses in our life, making it a recurring part of our life. To be exact, the creation of music was mainly for a distraction, making it easier for people to get through their lives.

The science behind music:

Music involves physics, biology, and neuroscience. The main concept behind music is vibrations that create sound waves. The sound waves travel through air to your ears, where they are converted into electrical signals. Music can activate the complex networks, influencing mood, emotions, and cognition through neurotransmitter release and the activation of various regions like the motor and reward systems.

- A musical note is a combination of a fundamental frequency and a series of overtones, or harmonics. This determines the quality or the “
- timbre
- ” of the sound.

The cognitive part of music is a bit complex, but here's the break down:

- Cognitive enhancement:
- Musical training can enhance cognitive functions like memory, attention span, and language skills. Learning an instrument or just learning music theory can help in the development of all of these cognitive abilities.
- Social connection:
- Listening to harmonious music together can increase social bonding by activating brain areas involved in social information processing.

- Behavioral effects:
- Music can evoke a huge range of emotions, including intense feelings. Certain sounds can activate a certain part of the brain which is involved in the fear response, this can slowly lead to cathartic experiences.

How does music affect the body?

If you pay attention to the music you're listening to and how it affects you, it usually tends to work on your mood and emotions. For example, fast and upbeat music can increase your heart rate and make you feel more excited instantly boosting your mood. While slow and calming music tends to lower your heart rate, reduce stress hormones, and promote relaxation.

- Heart rate:
- Exciting or fast-tempo music increases heart rates, blood pressure, and the respiratory rate. This is especially true when it comes to emotional moments in the music or during exercise. Slow music can slow down the heart rate and the respiratory rate, this helps the body relax. Music can affect the heart rate variability which is the variation time between heartbeats. Calming music can increase the HRV, which is a good sign of cardiovascular health, while exciting music can decrease it.
- Hormones:
- Uplifting music can stimulate the release of
- dopamine
- , which is a “feel-good” neurotransmitter that instantly elevates anyone’s mood. Calming music can help reduce the stress hormone
- cortisol
- , which can lower stress and anxiety levels. Music can also increase
- oxytocin
- , which is also known as the “love hormone” and is linked with feelings of trust and connection.
- Mood:
- By influencing the release of dopamine and other neurochemicals, pleasant music can improve your mood, it can reduce stress, and can even alleviate symptoms of depression. Calming music is also a powerful tool for relaxation (this will be talked about in the next part of this section!). Overall, listening to music can calm down the nervous system and help the body recover from stressful events. Music can also help in managing emotions, and listeners can choose different types of music to evoke desired feelings.

Music as Therapy:

Now we come to the most important part of this entire guide! Music as a therapy is, nowadays, a clinical practice that uses music within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs. It involves using music-based

interventions like singing, playing instruments or listening to help individuals achieve their own personal goals such as reducing stress, or improving their mood.

→ This is an evidence based approach, which has been tested in various settings and it is known to help a wide range of people including those already suffering from depression, and trauma.

How does it work?

As discussed before, music stimulates brain regions involved in emotion, memory, and motor control. This can release pleasure-inducing chemicals like dopamine and serotonin that reduce the stress hormone, cortisol. Usually, it's a music therapist that creates a personalized treatment plan based on your needs and goals. But with this app, you are able to plan your own therapy using the songs created! Most of the activities used in therapy for a person would include listening to music, singing, instrument playing, or songwriting. These are mainly designed to help you express yourself, your emotions, and process your feelings. Music therapy is usually conducted in a clinic, hospital, or a nursing home. But now, you can do right at the comfort of your home and at the exact moment you feel stressed.

There are many benefits to music including how it can alleviate anxiety and depression, and can improve self esteem and can also provide an outlet for emotional release. Music also helps in reducing stress, lifting moods, and increasing feelings of joy. Music therapy has been shown to also help reduce blood pressure and pain. It can also improve communication skills, especially for those who have difficulty in verbalizing their feelings. Music also helps stimulate memory and improve cognitive function.

Real life case study:

A 1-year old with down syndrome in music therapy had low energy at first, and required hands-on support to interact with instruments and tunes. The child was unable to follow simple directions or vocalize. The therapist used a playful approach to interact and help the child explore with musical instruments. The therapist first started to show the child different sounds to stimulate curiosity. The therapist was able to support the child by helping them touch and explore different instruments.

Over time, progress started picking up, and the child was following directions without additional help. The child began getting curious to the different sounds and was able to identify tunes and sounds. The child started playing the instruments and showed interest.

Outcome: The music therapy sessions were successful as it helped the child develop and improve their communication skills, motor skills, and social interaction. This shows progress from a state of complete dependence to more independent engagement.

Why do certain songs “feel” like us?

This is what we call *emotional resonance*. Emotional resonance is the feeling of understanding or connection that happens when something, like a story or an experience, evokes a deep emotion in you. It's not about feeling the exact same emotion as someone else, but about a story or interaction that connects with your own values,

memories, or current feelings. This doesn't have to happen with a person, it is most commonly felt with music as well. Music is something that people are able to connect with, and it makes them emotionally resonate with the artist, lyrics, or tune.

Some songs can help people feel nostalgia or can have memories attached to the songs. This allows people to remember things and there is a psychological link between personal memories, lyrics, and feelings. This is also seen through sad music, as they can paradoxically help in emotional release. Sometimes, people feel that music is a much more helpful thing to vent to rather than people. This gives off the "beautiful sadness" effect, allowing people to actually enjoy sad music, and to feel the need to be themselves.

Mirror neurons:

Mirror neurons in our brain are just cells that fire when an individual performs an action or when they observe someone else perform the same action. This is a mechanism that allows for functions like understanding the actions and intentions of others including imitation, and learning. It is commonly known as "putting yourself in someone else's shoes".

This is a given thing in our body that really helps in being *human*. We are able to interpret social cues as well as understand the emotional states of others. Some theories also suggest that the mirror neurons may have played a role in the evolution of language from *gesture-based* communication.

- In the music of psychology, there have been many theories established, and many studies providing evidence that it could actually be true. But one of the theories that I'm very sure you would agree with is the repetition theory. The theory of repetition in melodies helps in regulating anxious thoughts. In a recent study, songs like
 - "FE!N"
 - by Travis Scott,
 - "SAD!", and "Moonlight"
 - both by XXXTENTACION, have allowed people to relax from their issues. This is because these songs and other songs similar to these have repeated melodies, which allows listeners to predict the tunes in these songs, even the lyrics.

Music and Mindfulness:

Mindful listening can be a form of meditation for many, by engaging with the present moment through sounds, and transforming a typically passive activity into an active one. This helps people be aware, and calms the mind.

- Passive hearing:
- The unintentional and effortless perception of sound. It happens automatically and isn't forced, as the sound enters the ear. But the mind often wanders, filters, or ignores them.

Active Listening: This requires attention. It involves consciously choosing to focus on

the song, its rhythm, lyrics, pitch, without any judgement or mental commentary. This directed attention pulls the mind away from dwelling on the past or on the future, and it helps people stay firmly in the present.

The understanding theorem

When understanding is translated into action, emotional healing starts. Music is powerful in and of itself, but only when the listener knows how to use it purposefully can its effects become transformative. This section describes how you can use the music in this project to control your emotions, manage stress, and establish a methodical healing process. Consider this last chapter to be the link between theory and practice, the point at which all of your prior learning comes together.

Emotional Alignment:

It's critical to comprehend the significance of emotional awareness prior to utilizing music as a tool. Recognizing emotions is the first step toward healing, not suppressing them. The process of matching music to your current emotional state is called emotional alignment.

According to psychological research, people's emotions become less intense when they give labels to them. This occurs because recognizing your emotions triggers the brain's rational region, which in turn reduces stress. Emotional control becomes easier and more organic when this awareness is combined with the appropriate music.

Emotional alignment is simply starting from where you are. You start with music that expresses your feelings of overwhelm. When you're nervous, you start with music that fits your mind's rapid tempo. By doing this, you avoid emotional shock, which is the discomfort that results from attempting to calm yourself too rapidly. Rather, you experience a gradual shift in which the music first acknowledges your emotions before assisting you in becoming more at ease. This is the cornerstone of how this guide's music can aid in emotional recovery.

The Regulation Curve:

There is a pattern to the healing process. The emotional journey of regulation is surprisingly consistent, despite the fact that everyone experiences stress in a different way. I refer to this journey as the Regulation Curve. There are six steps involved:

- Acknowledge:
- Recognize your current feelings and acknowledge them.
- Match:
- picking music that reflects your initial emotional state.
- Release
- : letting the feeling flow, rise, or subside on its own.
- Regulate
- : switching to music that calms, lightens, or slows down the mind.
- Recover:
- feeling the quiet that comes after the emotional change.
- Reflect:
- After the session, reflect by writing down your feelings to gauge your progress.

Every step is necessary. Emotional tension remains trapped if it is not acknowledged. The music may seem disconnected from your reality if there is no matching. Emotions stay bottled up if they are not released. Recovery provides clarity, regulation brings about the change, and reflection fortifies awareness for the future.

The Regulation Curve is naturally supported by the music I created. The tracks' structure, progression, and tonality promote a shift from tension to release, despite the fact that they are not categorized by emotion. Consciously following the curve enables listeners to overcome their distress rather than becoming mired in it.

How to use music intentionally:

Music therapy is not a passive practice. It is a technique that is more intuitive than mindfulness or meditation. *You can make deliberate use of the music by following these steps:*

- 1. Set Up Your Space:** Look for a peaceful setting. Reduce distractions, turn down the lights, and use headphones if you can. Your mind is better able to concentrate on the sound in a quiet environment.
- 2. Establish an Intention:** Choose whether you want the session to be about grounding, emotional release, clarity, calmness, or just a pause. Establishing a goal aids in providing direction for the experience.
- 3. Pick the Correct Path:** Don't second-guess your decision. Choose the song that comes to mind first. Your intuition picks it for a reason.
- 4. Engage in Active Listening:** Concentrate on various sound layers. Spend a few seconds following a single instrument. Take note of the volume changes or the rhythm. Let your mind create the melody.
- 5. Let the Shift:** Let yourself change along with the music as it does. Breathe in time with the music, let your shoulders drop, and allow your thoughts to calm down a bit.
- 6. After the session, take stock of yourself:** In comparison to before, how do you feel now? Progress can be seen in even the smallest changes. You become more emotionally aware when you reflect.

Music becomes an emotional companion when it is intentionally listened to. It assists you in overcoming stress rather than avoiding it.

Using music to break the stress cycle:

Stress frequently exhibits patterns. Every form of stress, including arguments, overanalyzing, academic pressure, and emotional exhaustion, has a mental cycle. Through attentional rerouting and nervous system relaxation, music breaks this cycle.

- Pressure from Academics:

When your thoughts are cluttered or under pressure from expectations, turn to music. Your thoughts won't spiral out of control if you start with calming tunes.

- Overthinking at Night

The brain is relaxed and the cycle of recurring thoughts is broken by gentle, slow rhythms. Lying down and listening can help the body enter a state of rest.

- Unexpected Overwhelm or Anxiety

A steady-beat piece of music serves as an anchor. It slows the pounding heartbeat and stabilizes breathing.

- Conflicts or Overwhelming Emotions

Tracks with a lot of emotion help you let go of pent-up tension and transition from confusion to clarity.

- Emotional numbness or loneliness

You can find solace and re-establish a connection with your inner world by listening to warm, evocative sounds.

The stress cycle becomes weaker and eventually breaks if you choose music that is in line with your emotional state. The music serves as a conduit between relief and emotion.

Why is this section called “the understanding theorem”?

Because it illustrates the point at which knowledge turns into practice, this section is titled The Understanding Theorem. Anything that needs to be comprehended, used, and demonstrated is a theorem. Similar to this, using music to heal calls for awareness, purpose, and constant participation. It is a method, not a random process.

You discover a formula—a unique approach to emotional control that can be replicated, modified, and relied upon—when you comprehend how your emotions function, why particular types of music influence you, and how to navigate the Regulation Curve. This chapter demonstrates how music can be more than just a listening experience when it is understood properly. It turns into a methodical route to self-connection, clarity, and serenity.

*This is the heart of the **Understanding Theorem**.*

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Now, go listen to those tunes, and clear you mind.

Everything will be just fine.

ENJOY! :)