



Be inspired



We all know that listening to a favourite tune can lift our spirits, and singing or dancing helps to release feelgood endorphins.

But did you know that there are many other ways that music can help with everything from easing stress, improving diet and boosting relationships, both during pregnancy and once your baby is here?

TO REDUCE STRESS

For baby...
You can start using music before your child is born, as he can pick up sounds from 23-27 weeks gestation. Playing soothing tunes can benefit you both – and using the same tracks once he is born can be very effective at calming him down.

According to music therapist Melanie Garside (musictherapylondon.com), it's also a great idea to sing to your baby, both in and out of the womb. "It can be really calming for him," she explains. "Not only does he recognise your voice, but he will also benefit from the vibrations passing between you."

Find out how to use music as the soundtrack to a happier, healthier family life...

GOOD vibrations

For you...

Pregnancy can be stressful, so finding a way to chill out is very important for both you and your growing baby. "There are lots of relaxation tracks available," explains musician and reiki practitioner Catherine Rannus (belightfulmusic.co.uk). "They usually recommend that you sit or lie down and just listen. And if you can get into a good habit now, you're more likely to continue once your baby is born."

However, if you've barely a moment to yourself, even listening to your favourite music on the go helps your body to relax and release endorphins. "It keeps you in the here and now, which can be a great stress-reliever," says Catherine. "Try creating a soundtrack to your home – listening to music can make the duller of tasks, from sterilising bottles to ironing tiny outfits, seem less of a chore."

AT MEALTIMES

For baby...

Whether you're breastfeeding, using a bottle or have moved on to weaning, music can make mealtimes hit the right note. "Singing songs – for example, substituting the original words for ones related to food or milk – and incorporating your baby's name can, over time, help encourage even reluctant babies feed," says Melanie.

If you're too exhausted to exercise your vocal cords, then using a favourite track on your MP3 player can be effective. "Having that association with eating can help your baby to know what is expected," explains Melanie.

For you...

Statistics show that, on average, women gain 22-26lb during pregnancy – and dads have been known to bulk up

too, due to stress, sleep deprivation or even sharing pregnancy cravings.

According to Catherine, music can help that post-baby diet, particularly if you listen to a tune that has a slower beat while eating. "The music slows us down, and encourages us to savour our food," she explains. "It also stimulates our senses, meaning we appreciate food more."

FOR A BRAIN BOOST

For baby...

Having music on while your baby is playing can be stimulating. "It's called the Mozart effect," explains Catherine. "Studies have shown the music stimulates brainwaves and helps with thinking skills." This boost to brainpower can help with both your baby's development, as well as enhancing feelings of wellbeing.

For you...

Most of us, both during and after pregnancy, experience the phenomenon known as 'baby brain,' thought to be due, in part, to hormonal changes. This can make concentrating a challenge. Dads can also suffer as sleep deprivation starts. "Music can help us concentrate, even when flying from one task to the next," says Catherine. In addition, the positive mood music helps to create means that any lapses won't cause as much stress.



TO GET MOVING

For baby...

In the first few months, it can be very calming if you dance while holding your baby. "The movement can be very relaxing," says Melanie. "And you can sing at the same time." What's more, as your baby grows, using musical instruments with him – everything from a drum to a xylophone – helps him to develop fine motor

skills, as well as providing a fun opportunity for interaction.

For you...

Hard to find the energy to get to the gym? While it's not advisable to start high-impact sports too soon after giving birth, getting your body moving again can be very beneficial, although it's important to check with your doctor or midwife first. To aid motivation, try using a range of upbeat, high-octane tunes. They may also improve your endurance by helping take your focus off those reluctant muscles.

FOR A PEACEFUL NIGHT

For baby...

Using soothing sounds in the half hour or so before bed can work wonders. "It helps your baby slow down in readiness for sleep," explains Catherine. "Anything relaxing with a slow tempo should do." However, it's best not to let him fall asleep to music, as this can create problems. "If your child gets used to hearing music and begins to associate it with falling asleep, he may begin to feel he 'needs' to have it in order to drift off," says Catherine. "Instead, let music create a sleepy mood, but try to turn it down, or off, when it's time to sleep."

For you...

While you may not feel you need any help to sleep, it's important to remember bed doesn't have to be, ahem, all about sleep... A survey of new parents found more than 60 per cent felt their sex life had deteriorated since their baby was born. However, using music to create a romantic ambience during your dinner, for example, can put you in the mood, once your body is ready. Even if you aren't ready to resume the physical side of things, contact is still important. Why not give each other a massage, while listening to soothing sounds? Or listen to a special tune to remember a happy time together? **PE**

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