

Music Therapy Can Comfort Premature Infants



Specific elements of music have therapeutic qualities that may be beneficial to a growing premature infant. Recorded music has a fixed meter and decibel level, which cannot be adapted to meet the needs of a compromised infant the way live music can.

According to a study in the May 2013 issue of Pediatrics, [“The Effects of Music Therapy on Vital Signs, Feeding, and Sleep in Premature Infants.”](#) (published online April 15) three different types of music therapy interventions - live ocean disc whoosh sounds, gator box rhythms, and parent’s sung lullabies -- had a positive health effect on preemies.

Researchers studied 272 infants in 11 hospital neonatal intensive care units (NICUs), and found that live music provided by a certified music therapist can increase a premature infant’s capacity to feed, sleep, and self-regulate, whereas noise can have a negative impact on growth and development. Music therapy, especially the use of live, entrained (matched, in the moment with the infant’s breathing rate) breath and heart beat sounds, and parent-preferred lullabies can enhance a premature infant’s vitals and provide opportunities for bonding.

Lullabies, especially the singing of 'songs of kin' (parent-selected – culturally relevant songs) also eases the stress and anxiety of mothers and fathers, enhancing ease and attachment through NICU stays. Study authors determine that music therapy programs provide a valuable service to premature infants in the NICU. Parents should be encouraged to sing to their babies, providing a familiar and comforting voice, with a familiar theme, to help develop the emotional bond between the premature infant and parent.

Reference:

The Effects of Music Therapy on Vital Signs, Feeding, and Sleep in Premature Infants Joanne Loewy, Kristen Stewart, Ann-Marie Dassler, Aimee Telsey, and Peter Homel. Pediatrics. Published online April 15, 2013. doi: 10.1542/peds.2012-1367.

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