

The Joy of Music



Members of SongShine perform in a concert at the Annenberg Center for Health Sciences at Eisenhower.

It has become increasingly evident that the best course of therapy for many illnesses is to incorporate many different methods of treatment. With Parkinson's disease, this includes medications and occasionally brain surgery, as well as many non-pharmacological treatments. Making available and drawing upon different methods of treatment to bring patients the best possible quality of life is the foundation of Eisenhower's Phillip and Carol Traub Parkinson's Center.

One such method utilized at Eisenhower Medical Center is music. Music tickles the brain in ways that can be measured in the laboratory. Vinod Menon, MD and Daniel Levitin, MD placed headphones on a half dozen people, played classical music for each person and utilizing a special MRI machine that measures brain activity, measured the activity of the brain. In Neuroimage in 2005, Dr. Menon and Dr. Levitin reported an increase in brain activity in some deeper parts of the brain. Menon and Levitin hypothesized that dopamine might be responsible for this increase.

A study of music therapy as a form of treatment for Parkinson's disease was published in 2000 by Claudio Pacchetti, MD and his colleagues at the Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders Centre, University of Pavia, Italy. The researchers found that music therapy, including "choral singing, voice exercise, rhythmic and free body movements, and active music involving collective invention" produced measurable improvements in the participants' mobility, happiness, and overall sense of their quality of life.

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In 2007, researchers from the Program in Physical Therapy at Washington University in St. Louis reported positive effects on balance and mobility in Parkinson's patients who participated in an Argentine tango dance class.

The Phillip and Carol Traub Parkinson's Center has recognized the value of music therapy with its Songshine class. Songshine offers development and strengthening of the voice for the specific purpose of increasing vocal loudness and restoring oral communication. Under the direction of Ruthanna Metzgar, DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts), the weekly class is open to people with Parkinson's, neurological disorders or aging voices.

Rhythm and movement are the focus of the Center's PD in Motion class, led by Lisa Manning, CET. PD in Motion helps patients improve muscle strength, balance and gait through exercise. Coming soon...a square dance group, open to anyone with feet, even if they are two left ones!