

Music for insomnia in adults

→ Summery

Listening to pre-recorded music daily, either at bedtime or at some time throughout the day.
Listening to music can be used alone or combined with other relaxation techniques.

→ Indication & Benefits

In 2015 German composer Max Richter released 'Sleep', an eight-hour 'lullaby for a frenetic world' and at the world premiere in London, listeners were offered beds instead of chairs.

Adults with insomnia, with the aim of improving sleep quality.

On the Epworth Sleep quality scale, music intervention showed a moderate effect (a 1 standard deviation improvement) in favour of intervention.

Music may improve sleep by enhancing relaxation (decreasing sympathetic arousal, anxiety and stress responses) and/or acting as a distraction from stressful thoughts. Different effects may depend on the type of music used, the aetiology of the insomnia and the length and duration of the intervention.

Although listening to music can lead to clinically significant improvement in subjective sleep quality, it does not appear to specifically reduce the length of time it takes to get to sleep, increase the amount of sleep someone gets, or reduce the number of times someone wakes up.

→ Contraindication and Adverce Effects

Precautions

None reported.

Adverse effects

None reported.

→ Practical Description

Pre-recorded music is listened to for 25–60 minutes daily, either at bedtime or throughout the day, over 3 days to 5 weeks. The practice can be continued over the long term.

The most convincing evidence for beneficial effect is if the music is familiar to the listener and is listened to at bedtime for a period of 45 minutes.

→ Availability

Pre-recorded music is widely available at no or minimal cost, and the intervention is self-administered.

Music therapists recommend that the music should be slow tempo with an absence of abrupt changes and rhythmic complexities.

→ Resources

Tips and challenges

The music used should be any preferred slow, soft, relaxing and soothing music in the range of 60–80 beats per minute.

In addition to listening to music, patients may benefit from other non-drug interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and stimulus control therapy, as well as social support.

It is not known if there is a benefit for patients with more severe, chronic insomnia.

There may be a threshold effect of music on sleep, or patients may develop a tolerance to the relaxation effects of music.

Consumer resources

Websites such as <https://songbpm.com> and www.bpmdatabase.com can be used to identify the beats per minute of preferred songs.

→ Evidence

Grading

NHMRC Level 1 evidence.

1. Jespersen KV, Koenig J, Jennum P, Vuust P. Music for insomnia in adults. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2015; 8: CD010459. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD010459.pub2.

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