



Wellbeing Insights

Living a Better, More Vibrant Life



Music to Soothe the Holiday Soul

“Music moves me, to laugh or sing or cry. Music moves me, to reach right to the sky. Music can do what you want it to, no matter who you are ...” – *Artist Unknown*

Often learned in elementary school music classes, this ballad hits all the right notes when it comes to exploring the impact of music on our emotional wellbeing. For many of us, spontaneously hearing a song can evoke strong memories and even bring us back to our emotional state at that time. Similarly, in their own right, songs can arouse emotions and feelings through both their lyrics and/or melody. Have you ever been brought to tears by an orchestra’s performance or tended to a broken heart through music?

Neuroscientists have an explanation for the powerful effect music has on our memories and emotional state. Stated simply, when processing music, the areas of the brain responsible for language, memory, emotion and creativity are all engaged and synergistically connected. As it relates to emotion, specifically, researchers have found that music an individual finds pleasurable or that is associated with positive memories (regardless of its tone or lyrics) releases neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, that give us feelings of happiness.

Understanding the science behind the impact of music on one’s psyche can be helpful in employing it therapeutically and strategically.

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Music to Soothe the Holiday Soul

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From using it to get through difficult times to enhancing or complementing an already positive time to creating new memories that can be evoked in the future, music can be a powerful tool to influence our emotional wellbeing, including during the holiday season. Consider the following when preparing a restorative holiday season playlist:

1. Decide what kind of music you like or connect with emotionally; think “thrills and chills” – and go from there. Services like Pandora, Spotify and Amazon Music can help you peruse a variety of music so you can decide what artists, era, style and type of music you connect with.
2. If you’re selecting music that has been part of past holiday traditions or periods, take note of what memories come to mind and how you feel as you listen to those songs. Determine if

these feelings are desirable or not. This is especially true of holiday tunes you may have listened to growing up that evoke feelings of nostalgia but may also be true of songs that were inadvertently played during a holiday season where you suffered tragedy, such as the loss of a loved one. Be prepared that the memories – along with your emotional state (for better or worse) during that period of time – can vividly arise due to the brain’s strong association among melody, memory and emotion.

3. Along the lines of the latter, if you are trying to drown out past memories and emotions associated with a song, consider playing it more frequently and perhaps year over year so your brain’s network of centers that influence music and emotion can be updated or overridden with new memories.

4. Create new associations between music and memory by incorporating new tunes with holiday fun or traditions. Consider a fun playlist to sing along with your children during holiday present wrapping, cooking, baking or other seasonal activities. Find soothing and personally meaningful music to wind down or meditate to throughout the day. You can also put together a compilation of songs to accompany you during winter walks or runs. The opportunities to find ways to positively pair memory making and music are endless.

In the spirit of the childhood tune, indeed music can move us to laugh or sing or cry. And in learning how music can do whatever we want it to, the power lies within us to enhance our emotional wellbeing during the hustle and bustle of the holidays and beyond. So tune in and take charge. Happy and healing holidays!

Mindful Minute



In times of anxiety we can find ourselves feeling completely overwhelmed – as if we can’t possibly take one moment to tend to ourselves. Our focus becomes set on the goal of alleviating the anxiety as quickly as possible. What if instead we took a moment to turn toward our difficulties and acknowledge this uncomfortable feeling? This month, we have a simple, 30-second practice designed to help you find a sense of calm and refocus during these tense moments. It’s called **a mindful pause**.

Think of it as a sort of ‘spot treatment’ for times when you’re feeling stressed or overwhelmed but have lots to get done and don’t have the option of extended relaxation time.

Here’s how it works:

1. **Take a deep breath.** One deep inhale and exhale will get you started.
2. **Turn your focus inward.** Observe any physical sensations (temperature, tightness in the stomach or chest, etc.) as well as emotional sensations (feelings of stress or anxiety). Simply allow them to pass without labeling them as good or bad.
3. **Bring your attention to your breath.** No need to try to change your natural breath; just focus on it. Pay attention to the sensations as you inhale and exhale. Notice the way your nostrils feel or connect to the sensation of the chest or belly rising and falling –

whatever makes most sense to you. Paying attention to the breath will help anchor you in the present moment. This can be as short as two breath cycles or as long as you want to sit with it.

4. **Refocus and carry on!** Begin to re-engage with the world by asking yourself these two simple questions: “Where am I right now?” and “What is the smallest step I can take this moment to get me closer to where I need to be?”

Because the mindful pause is quick and discrete you can perform it anywhere! The hardest part isn’t the mindful pause itself but rather remembering to do it in the first place. You may start by creating prompts for mindful pauses, and once it becomes a part of your daily toolbox you will be more likely to use them in moments of stress.

On the Menu

Pears

Did you know that pears are one of the oldest cultivated fruits known? In 5000 B.C., a Chinese diplomat by the name of Feng Li began grafting fruits like apples, peaches, persimmons and pears as a business venture. Pears have been beloved by almost all cultures throughout history, having been named “a gift of the gods” in Homer’s The Odyssey. They were also a common feature in elegant Renaissance art.

In more modern history, early colonists brought pears to America’s East coast where they were enjoyed until rampant crop disease became widespread. Luckily, pear trees were brought to America’s West coast in Oregon and Washington in the 1800s. Today, the Pacific Northwest still cultivates pears that are like early varieties from France and Belgium. Known for their crisp yet buttery texture and long storage life, they continue to be a fan favorite of all ages. Pears also host a variety of nutritional benefits. Here are a few reasons to snack on pears this winter season:

- **They are high in fiber.** A medium-sized pear contains 6 grams of fiber, which is roughly 25% of the daily recommended amount. Fiber aids in digestion and is known to help stabilize blood sugars and support weight loss, as well as prevent flare-ups in those who suffer from diverticulitis.
- **They are high in antioxidants.** Specifically, pears are high in Vitamins C and K and the mineral copper. These antioxidants help clean up free radicals in the body, protecting cells from damage.
- **They have been linked to a lower risk of diabetes.** Pears contain a chemical compound known as anthocyanin. Some studies have shown that eating 5 or more servings of anthocyanin-rich foods per week, such as red pears, is associated with as much as a 23% decreased risk of type 2 diabetes.

Some nutritional benefits of pears depend on their variety. For example, pears with more of a red hue contain higher levels of anthocyanins and promote heart health and strengthened blood vessels. Meanwhile, pears with green skin contain lutein and zeaxanthin – two compounds known to promote healthy eye sight, especially as you age.

Keep It Fresh

Pears are known for their long shelf-life. If you purchase pears that are under-ripe, you may store them at room temperature in a single layer until they darken in color. Once ripe, pears store well in the fridge for a few weeks.

Baked Pears with Cinnamon

Baked pears make for a healthy, comforting snack even in the coldest months. Pair with yogurt and nuts for a balanced breakfast. You can also serve them with a scoop of vanilla ice cream as a festive holiday dessert.

Ingredients:

- 4 ripe pears
- 1½ Tbsp. pure maple syrup
- Generous sprinkle of cinnamon

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°. Slice pears in half and scoop out seeds. Drizzle each pear with maple syrup and sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake in oven-proof dish for 25 to 30 minutes, until soft and tender. Top with your choice of yogurt, granola, butter, nuts or ice cream.



Nutrition Info

Per Serving (1 whole pear)

Calories	116
Total Fat	0.3g
Carbohydrates	30.3g
Sugar	20.7g
Fiber	5.2g
Protein	0.6g

Adapted from Runningonrealfood.com

Ask the Experts

Get to know the CBIZ Engagement & Wellbeing Consulting team as we ask our experts about their own personal journey to living a vibrant life. This month we sat down with Lacey McCourt, Anna Rudolph and Ray Goolsby. Check out what they had to say.



Lacey McCourt,
Senior Engagement & Wellbeing
Consultant

Known on our team as
The Orchestrator:
Attentive, Dedicated, Efficient



Anna Rudolph,
Engagement & Wellbeing
Specialist

Known on our team as
The Mediator:
Steadfast, Composed, Structured



Ray Goolsby,
Engagement & Wellbeing
Specialist

Known on our team as
The Anchor:
Protective, Purposeful, Analytical

Q Research suggests we are happy and fulfilled when we are able to apply our strengths to our work to find purpose and meaning. How do you bring your unique strengths to work each day?

Lacey: As the Orchestrator, two of my personality traits are that I am protective of my team, and I value and encourage play. I am motivated by and thrive on helping both my clients and my team succeed, but I don't take myself too seriously in the process. Adding a little silliness into your day makes work not feel so work-y.

Anna: One of my biggest strengths is organization. I am someone who always has a to-do list, and I love crossing things off. It makes me feel accomplished and confident in my work. I find comfort in knowing that others can depend on me to get projects done efficiently and that they can count on me for support.

Ray: I am a rational/analytical thinker and able to stay calm in stressful situations. While I may be quiet, it's because I think before I speak or act so that I can communicate my opinion backed by solid evidence and come up with workable solutions in a hectic situation.

Q Are there any new trends, products or practices related to fitness, nutrition, sleep or mental health that you are really interested in right now?

Lacey: I joined [Orangetheory](#) over the summer and I'm totally hooked! The use of a heartrate monitor allows you to see your calories burned in real time so you can challenge yourself even further. Every day is a different workout, which makes it feel like it's your own personal training session with a fantastic coach pushing you along the way.

Anna: I recently started using an app called [Sleep Cycle](#) to track my sleep patterns. It has been really interesting to see how my sleep affects my mood and productivity and also how my nutrition and exercise affect how well I sleep. I notice on the days I do not eat very healthy, maybe have processed foods or high-sugar foods, I do not stay in deep sleep as long. I usually wake up extra tired the next morning, no matter how many hours of sleep I get.

Ray: I am a huge fan of goat yoga. This is something that is becoming more popular on social media, so I decided to give it a try while on vacation in Los Angeles. I enjoyed it way more than I thought I would. I am an animal lover so the goats help bring more peace and serenity into the room during our yoga session.

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Ask the Experts

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Q What is your single most important self-care ritual – the one thing you do for yourself that is non-negotiable?

Lacey: Sleep. I know that I cannot perform at my best without a good night's sleep. For me, that means a solid 8 hours. My nighttime routine includes getting into bed about 30 minutes before I want to be asleep, turning off all screens, turning on my white noise app and reading a few pages of a book. Typically I can fall asleep pretty fast and wake up feeling rested.

Anna: Scheduling time to be active. It doesn't have to be anything extreme. Some days it's going to an exercise class/the gym, going on a walk or as simple as taking my dog to the dog park. If I'm stressed or anxious about something, I immediately feel so much better after taking a break to be active.



Ray: Doing a face mask while deep conditioning my hair. The health of my skin and hair is a priority for me; tending to them provides a sort of safe haven, so it's important that I invest the time to properly care for them at least once a week.

Q Maintaining a habit of physical activity can be particularly challenging during the winter months. What has been most successful in helping you stay active?

Lacey: I've always been a gym/group fitness class kind of person. With Orangetheory, I sign up for a specific class to hold my spot and feel accountable to show up. I have a few friends who are members at other locations, so it's fun to challenge ourselves and share results. With that support, the accountability of advanced scheduling and the fact that I always leave gym clothes in my car, weather is never really an excuse to not get in a sweat.

Anna: In the winter months it is crucial that I have a routine because I'm usually not as motivated. At the beginning of the week I plan out when and where I'm going to work out. Making it a part of my daily routine helps so I don't come up with excuses not to go. I like to choose a workout class that I have to schedule in advance or make a plan to work out with friends to keep me accountable.

Ray: The most successful way I stay active in the winter is by packing my gym clothes to take with me to work. That way when I get off, I go straight to the gym. If I leave work and go to my cozy home, it makes it harder to go back out in the cold weather.



Q What is your #1 piece of advice for optimal wellbeing?

Lacey: Use your vacation days! Get out your calendar today and start making plans for 2020. This allows you to save money and research the details. Just the act of planning can bring you joy. Even if it's a simple long-weekend road trip, I love having upcoming events to look forward to throughout the year.



Anna: Find a balance that works for you. It's about creating time for both the things you love and the things that just have to get done. Particularly when it comes to work, I know in order for me to be successful I need to take time for myself or else I might not be giving it my all. Everyone is different, so find a healthy balance in your life roles that works for you.

Ray: Focus on your total wellbeing – your mental and financial wellbeing are just as important as physical. Paying attention to your body is significant, so make sure you're not skipping out on your annual check-up with your health provider and not using Google as your doctor. Manage your time in a way that allows space for what matters most to you.

Parenting Corner

5 Tips for a Festive Season of Family Fun

During the holidays, there is added pressure as a parent. We need to buy the gifts, cook the food, decorate impeccably and juggle all the schedules with a smile on our face. Our children are supposed to be there smiling by our side – the absolute picture of a happy (well-behaved) family. However, parents are no stranger to expressions of ungratefulness, entitlement and greed from the kids on occasion. And while it may feel like a losing battle at times, the holidays truly are a wonderful opportunity for togetherness. With a little planning we can enjoy our families and keep our sanity at the same time.

1. Set reasonable expectations. When those Hallmark movie scenes enter your mind, remember, you may also be dealing with sibling rivalry, tantrums or simply not getting the reaction you wanted to a gift you have given. It's all a normal part of the experience so give yourself (and your kids) some grace to handle it as it comes.

2. Aim for consistency. There will be late nights and missed naptimes for special events, but the cumulative results over time can be hazardous to moods and attitudes throughout the household. When possible, stick to a normal routine or plan for some course correction after a large upheaval.

3. Leave space to breathe. Keeping some space in your schedule will be crucial for course correction. Not to mention, some of the best moments are when you can snuggle in with a movie and some hot chocolate or pile in the car on a whim to drive around looking at all the lights.

4. Get intentional about gifting practices. It can be difficult not to inundate your kids with every single thing on their wish list, but spoiling them (and your pocketbook) isn't logical either. Keep it reasonable and advise relatives to do the same. Additionally, consider the worth of experiences vs. things. When they are grown, they will remember the traditions and family activities over the wrapped gifts.

5. Encourage the kids to give thoughtfully. Kids love to give, but it often falls to the wayside since the focus tends to put children on the receiving end of gift giving. Provide an allowance and have your kids choose someone special in their life, such as the crossing guard or the McDonald's cashier, to create a gift for. You might be pleasantly surprised what they come up with.

Lastly, enjoy your holiday. Stay in the moment and soak it up – the good and the less than picturesque. Keep a childlike wonder for the holidays, fully participating in the joyous moments.



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