

The Power of Music for People Living with Dementia and their Carers

By Dr Warren Donnellan*

School of Psychology, University of Liverpool

* In collaboration with Xiaoxiao Hou and Dr Eduardo Coutinho, Department of Music and Dr Helen Brooks, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Liverpool.



Dr Warren Donnellan is a Lecturer from the School of Psychology at the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on the health psychology of older adults, specifically resilience and dementia care.

We are all familiar with the therapeutic power of music. Whilst listening to, and enjoying music, is a universal experience, it can be particularly beneficial for [people living with physical or mental health difficulties](#). This is reflected in the growing use of music as an intervention for people living with dementia. Dementia is a [progressive syndrome associated with deterioration in cognitive function beyond what might be expected from normal ageing](#). In the absence of a pharmacological ‘cure’, music interventions provide a [more holistic approach to help people live well with dementia](#). As Fiona Pritchard notes in a recent [Age of Creativity blog](#), ‘music is a common language which helps maintain a person’s identity and awaken positive life histories’.

Amongst other functions, music has a unique ability to [unlock positive autobiographical memories](#), such as a wedding day, a child being born, or a significant birthday, [which are often impaired by dementia](#). Music interventions have been shown to have a range of benefits for people living with dementia, including [reduced anxiety and elevated mood and quality of life](#). They are also [flexible and cost-effective with very few, if any, adverse consequences](#). Carers can also benefit from music as much as their loved ones, both directly and indirectly. For example, evidence suggests that shared music listening can [improve the wellbeing of carers](#) and [interpersonal emotional intimacy between care recipient and carer](#). However, more research is needed to establish the benefits of music interventions on carers of people with dementia.



Music interventions can be administered in different ways. Most research has focused on group-based activities where members sing or play instruments, usually within a residential care setting. Indeed, this was the subject of a recent

BBC Documentary, [Our Dementia Choir with Vicky McClure](#), where the actor formed a band and choir made up of former musicians and singers with dementia. These music-making activities have been shown to be [very effective](#). However, singing and playing instruments relies on a certain level of functioning and may not be appropriate as dementia progresses. Individual music listening may be more appropriate for people with advanced dementia as the [brain areas for music processing remain intact for longer](#). No research has systematically explored the mechanisms underlying the positive

effects of music listening on both people living with dementia and their carers. This is where our research comes in.

Our research

Our project aims to design, deliver and evaluate an individual music listening intervention for older adults living with dementia and their carers. The intervention will be administered primarily within residential care settings, including care homes and nursing homes. Currently, we are conducting a systematic review of the existing literature to explore the efficacy of music listening interventions on a range of outcomes and whether method of delivery has an effect on this. This will inform the development of our own music listening intervention. We hope that our findings will have important implications for the treatment and care of everyone affected by dementia.

If you'd like to find out more about our research or anything included in this article, contact the team on wjd@liverpool.ac.uk or Twitter [@DrWizWaz](https://twitter.com/DrWizWaz).

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