

# Music helps you tune out and tone up

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*Janet McMordie, MSc Student, University of Western Ontario*



New research has found that women can improve their workouts, especially their strengthening exercises, when they turned up their favorite tunes. “They performed a lot better and were happier,” says study author Janet McMordie, a graduate student at the University of Western Ontario in Canada who is working toward a master’s degree in kinesiology.

She says the findings add to a growing body of research suggesting that music is a real motivator for exercise. “It can help you get through your workout,” says McMordie. “From a personal standpoint, I can’t exercise without music,” she says. “I find it really boring. Psychologically, music gets you pumped up and it also distracts you from what you’re doing.”

Music might also cause a surge of adrenaline that kicks things up, she says.

The study, which McMordie presented at a recent meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine, involved 18 women ages 20 to 22 who were regularly active. During separate sessions, the women performed three short exercise tests without music or while listening to music that was set at their individual preferred levels (an average of 65 to 70 decibels), music that was 20 decibels lower than preferred or music that was 20 decibels higher than preferred, as long as it wasn’t loud enough to cause immediate hearing damage, she says.

Long or repeated exposure to sounds at or above 85 decibels can cause hearing loss, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communications Disorders. To put this into perspective, normal conversation is about 60 decibels, noise on a busy city street can reach 85 decibels, and sounds from motorcycles, firecrackers and small firearms can soar to 120 to 150 decibels, the institute notes.

For the study, the participants could pick their favorite “pump-up” song. “I had everything from Madonna to Pink Floyd, Rihanna to Pantera,” says McMordie. They listened to each volume level or no music while cycling as hard as they could for 30 seconds and while performing leg press repetitions and bench press repetitions.

With cycling, results showed, listening to music at all volume levels helped the women power through the test better than when they had no music. “Music seemed to help participants push through the psychological aspect of the test that is telling them that ‘it’s too hard’ or ‘just quit,’ as well as push a little extra through the pain caused by lactic acid build-up [in the muscles],” McMordie says.

But with strength-training, the louder music had the greatest effect. Women could perform more repetitions before fatiguing when the music was louder than when it was softer or they weren’t listening to any music. With the leg press, for instance, the women did an average of 26 repetitions before becoming exhausted when they weren’t listening to music. They did an average of 29 reps with both the preferred and soft volume levels. But with louder music, the women could do an average of 36 reps.