

18 Benefits of Playing a Musical Instrument

by Michael Matthews on AUGUST 28, 2011

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The Chinese philosopher Confucius said long ago that “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.” Playing a musical instrument has many benefits and can bring joy to you and to everyone around you. This article will provide you with 18 benefits of playing an instrument (in no particular order) and will hopefully give you a better sense of appreciation and pride for music.

1. Increases the capacity of your memory.

Research has shown that both listening to music and playing a musical instrument stimulate your brain and can increase your memory. A study was done in which 22 children from age 3 to 4 and a half years old were given either singing lessons or keyboard lessons. A control group of 15 children received no music lessons at all. Both groups participated in the same preschool activities. The results showed that preschoolers who had weekly keyboard lessons improved their spatial-temporal skills 34 percent more than the other children. Not only that, but researchers said that the effect lasted long-term.

(Source: <http://brainconnection.positscience.com/topics/?main=fa/music-education2#A1>)

According to an article from The Telegraph online magazine, “New research suggests that regularly playing an instrument changes the shape and power of the brain and may be used in therapy to improve cognitive skills.” There is continually more evidence that musicians have organizationally and functionally different brains compared to non-musicians, especially in the areas of the brain used in processing and playing music. If you learn how to play an instrument, the parts of your brain that control motor skills (ex: using your hands, running, swimming, balancing, etc.), hearing, storing audio information, and memory actually grow and become more active. Other results show that playing an instrument can help your IQ increase by seven points.

(Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/6447588/Playing-a-musical-instrument-makes-you-brainier.html>)

2. Refines your time management and organizational skills.

Learning how to play an instrument requires you to really learn how to be organized and to manage your time wisely. A good musician knows that the quality of practice time is more valuable than the quantity. In order for a musician to progress quicker, he/she will learn how to organize his/her practice time and plan different challenges to work on, making efficient use of time.

3. Boosts your team skills.

Team skills are a very important aspect of being successful in life. Playing an instrument requires you to work with others to make music. In band and orchestra settings you must learn how to cooperate with the people around you. Also, in order for a group to make beautiful music, each player and section must learn how to listen to each other and play together.

4. Teaches you perseverance.

Learning to play an instrument takes time and effort, which really teaches you patience and perseverance. Most people can't play every piece of music perfectly the first time. In fact, the majority of musicians have to work difficult sections of music multiple times in a row before they can play it correctly.

5. Enhances your coordination.

The art of playing an instrument requires a lot of hand-eye coordination. By reading musical notes on a page, your brain subconsciously must convert that note into specific motor patterns while also adding breathing and rhythm to the mix.

6. Better your mathematical ability.

Reading music requires counting notes and rhythms and can help your math skills. Also, learning music theory includes many mathematical aspects. Studies have shown that students who play instruments or study the arts are often better in math and achieve higher grades in school than students who don't. (Source: Friedman, B. (1959) An evaluation of the achievement in reading and arithmetic of pupils in elementary schools instrumental classes. Dissertation Abstracts International, 20, pp.s 3662-3663.)

7. Improves your reading and comprehension skills.

According to a study published in the journal Psychology of Music, "Children exposed to a multi-year program of music tuition involving training in increasingly complex rhythmic, tonal, and practical skills display superior cognitive performance in reading skills compared with their non-musically trained peers."

(<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090316075843.htm>)

It's not surprising to hear results like that because music involves constant reading and comprehension. When you see black and white notes on a page, you have to recognize what the note name is and translate it to a finger/slide position. At the same time, you also have to read what rhythms the notes are arranged in and force your tongue to produce the correct pattern.

8. Increases your responsibility.

Playing an instrument comes with its responsibilities. Maintenance and care are very important in keeping an instrument in working condition. Each instrument has different procedures to keep in functioning properly, but most instruments need cleaning and some form of oiling/greasing. In addition to maintenance responsibilities, there are other aspects such as remembering music events (like rehearsals and performances) and making time to practice.

9. Exposes you to cultural history.

Oftentimes music reflects the environment and times of its creation. Therefore, you learn a variety of music types such as classical traditions, folk music, medieval, and other genres. Music itself is history, and each piece usually has its own background and storyline that can further your appreciation of other cultures.

10. Sharpens your concentration.

Playing music by yourself requires you to concentrate on things like pitch, rhythm, tempo, note duration, and quality of sound. Playing music in a group involves even more concentration because you must learn to not only hear yourself, but you must listen to all the other sections and play in harmony with the rest of the group.

11. Fosters your self-expression and relieves stress.

It's your instrument, so you can play whatever you want on it! The more advanced you become on an instrument, the greater you'll be able to play what you want and how you want. Music is an art—just like an artist can paint his/her emotions onto a canvas, so can a musician play a piece with emotion. This has proven to relieve stress and can be a great form of therapy. In fact, music therapy has been useful in treating children and teens with autism, depression, and other disorders.

12. Creates a sense of achievement.

Overcoming musical challenges that you thought you'd never quite master can give you a great sense of pride about yourself. When you first start learning how to play an instrument, it seems like just holding out a note for a couple beats or hitting a high pitch is an amazing accomplishment. As you practice and become a more experienced musician, making beautiful sounding music pleasing not only to your ear, but others as well is a very rewarding experience.

13. Promotes your social skills.

Playing an instrument can be a great way to enhance your social skills. Some of the best people join bands and orchestras, and many times the friends you make here become like family. It's very common for people to gain lifelong friendships through musical activities like these.

14. Boosts your listening skills.

Although it's pretty obvious, playing an instrument requires you to listen very carefully to things. You have to learn how to hear when you're playing a wrong note in order to correct yourself. Tuning your instrument means hearing if the pitch you're playing is high (sharp) or low (flat). When playing in an ensemble, you have to listen for the melody and play softer if you're the supporting part (accompaniment). There are too many examples to list every possibility here, but by playing an instrument you are guaranteed to improve your listening skills.

15. Teaches you discipline.

As previously mentioned, playing an instrument can be very challenging. One of the qualities that musicians learn is discipline. Practicing often and working on the hard parts of music and not just the easy and fun stuff requires discipline. The best musicians in the world are masters of discipline which is why they are so successful on their instrument.

16. Elevates your performance skills and reduces stage fright.

One of the goals of practicing so much on your instrument is so that you can perform for others. The more you get up in front of people and perform, the more you'll reduce any stage fright. Playing on stage in a band or orchestra helps with stage fright because you're not alone. Also, being prepared and really knowing how to play your part makes it much easier to get up and play for a crowd.

17. Enhances your respiratory system.

If you have a good music director/tutor, you should hear them tell you quite often to "use more air!" Air is one of the key components in making wonderful-sounding music. In order to play any piece of music correctly when playing an instrument, you'll need to take huge breaths and learn how to expel the air properly to make the desired sound. Breathing exercises are highly recommended for musicians, and they can really strengthen your respiratory system.

18. Promotes happiness in your life and those around you.

Playing a musical instrument can be very fun and exciting. Not only is it fun to play music that you enjoy, but it feels wonderful to hear an audience applaud you for giving a great performance. It can also be very honorable and gratifying to voluntarily play in your local community and see the happiness on people's faces because they enjoy watching you play.

Conclusion

As you can see, playing a musical instrument has many benefits and hopefully that will motivate you to keep on practicing and always hold music in high esteem. Whenever you come across challenges as a musician, think about the end results and always remind yourself of all the great reasons you love to play. I'll leave you with an inspiring quote by jazz saxophonist and composer Charlie Parker who once said, "Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn."