

‘If music be the food of love, play on’. Based on evidence on the power of music for the brain, I would like to change this famous quote from the opening of *The Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare to ‘If music be the food of the brain, play on’.

From infants to the elderly, music has a power over the brain.

**Listen to the sound of music:** Listening to music activates different parts of the brain related to attention, processing information, memory, and emotional processing. What is really powerful is that music can heal the adult brain as well. Studies reveal that just listening to music can result in faster cognitive recovery in stroke patients. Their verbal memory and attention improved faster, compared to people who just listen to audio books. As a bonus, listening to music during stroke recovery also prevents negative moods, such as depression.

**Improve your memory:** Studies on people with Alzheimer's disease found that when words are put to music, their memory is even better than healthy adults of the same age. Parts of the brain associated with memory work at a slower pace in those with Alzheimer's disease. However, putting music to words that need to be remembered creates a stronger memory link than just repeating the words on their own. So if you know someone with Alzheimer's disease who is struggling to remember daily tasks, put it to music and sing it to them.

**Clap your hands:** It sounds surprising but children who sing songs that involved hand clapping have better skills, like neater handwriting and fewer spelling mistakes. It may be that the motor skill component of hand clapping helps in the classroom too. But since kids love clapping while they are singing, it is a great opportunity to develop the motor component part of the brain. But clapping is not just for kids' songs. Make an effort to clap along when you hear a song. Focus on the beat of the song and clap in tempo. This will train your brain to follow the tempo (see the next point below).

**Get a drum:** Rhythm is linked to working memory skills. For example, something as simple as being able to remember the sequence of taps is related to how well you can remember what someone has just told you. Most information involves a sequence. For example, you have to remember things in the order that you were told them. This progression of doing one thing first, then another, then the next, and finally the last is very similar to how people remember a sequence of sounds. So the next time you listen to a song, pay attention to the beat—it can boost your memory

### ***Drumming for your Brain***

You need a friend to help you with this one, but it's a great activity to do while you're waiting. Ask your friend to hum a tune in his head. But he can't tell you what the song is. Next, ask him to tap the tune's rhythm out on the table.

Listen carefully, and then tap the rhythm out as soon as your friend's finished. See whether you can remember the rhythm. Try to get as much of the beat correct. Your memory for rhythm is closely connected to your memory for language. By training how well you can remember a particular rhythm, you're boosting your language skills as well.

Excerpts from *Training Your Brain For Dummies*

Short Bio

Tracy Alloway, PhD, is Professor of Psychology at the University of North Florida. Formerly, she was the Director of the Center for Memory and Learning in the Lifespan. She is an expert on working memory and education, and developed the internationally recognized Alloway Working Memory Assessment. She writes a blog for Psychology Today, and co-authored *The Working Memory Advantage: Train Your Brain to Function Stronger, Smarter, Faster*.