

# The Sound of Music

February 2024



INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHCARE  
POLICY AND INNOVATION  
**NATIONAL POLL  
ON HEALTHY AGING**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

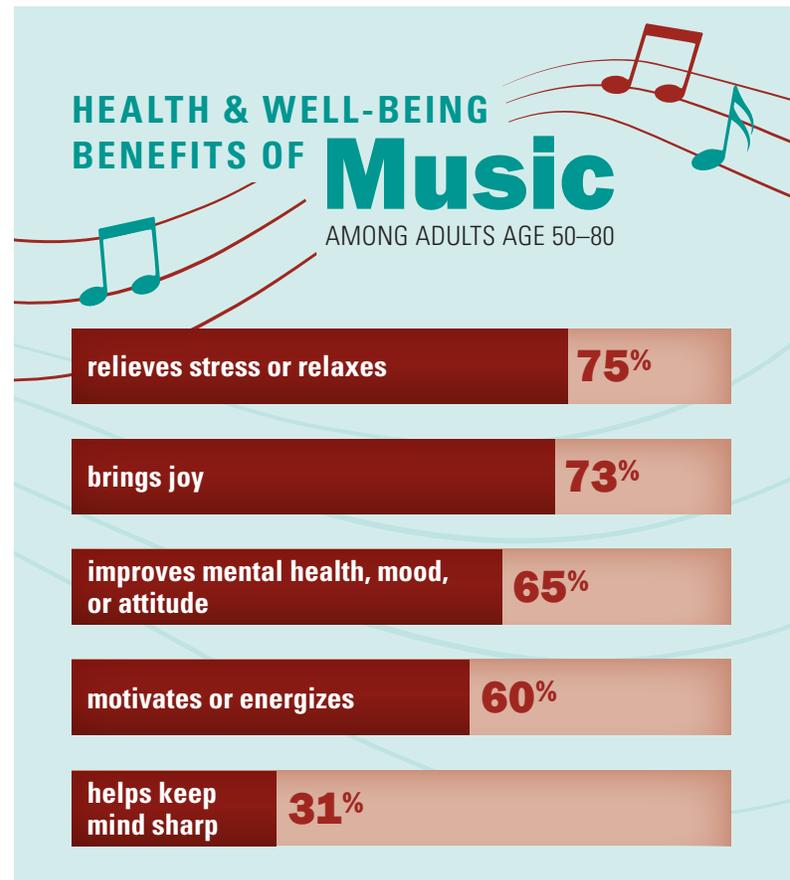
Music has always played a central role in human culture. People produce, appreciate, and enjoy music in a wide range of contexts. Moreover, music offers both mental and physical health benefits, including reduced stress, elevated mood, lowered blood pressure, and relief of pain and symptoms of depression. In August 2023, the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging asked a national sample of adults age 50–80 about their experiences with music, the benefits music provides, barriers to engaging in musical activities, and the overall importance of music in their lives.

## Engagement with music

More than half of older adults (56%) said they listen to music daily, and 29% listen to music a few times per week. Those less likely to listen to music daily included those age 65–80, in fair or poor physical health, with a health problem or disability that limits daily activities, with annual household incomes under \$60,000, and who reported often feeling socially isolated.

Three in ten older adults (30%) said that lack of time limits how much they listen to music. Other limits included lack of interest (12%); health factors (e.g., limited mobility, changes in dexterity, vision/hearing impairments, pain) (3%); and lack of access (3%).

Four in five adults age 50–80 (80%) reported viewing musical performances on TV or the internet at least a few times in the past year. About two in five older adults (41%) attended live musical concerts in-person at least a few times in the past year, with higher likelihood for those with higher incomes and more education.



One in five older adults (21%) reported singing daily, and 25% said they sing a few times a week, with women more likely to sing than men. Nearly one in ten (8%) indicated they have sung with other people (such as in a choir) at least a few times in the past year, with almost twice as many Black respondents (15%) having done so.

Overall, 17% of adults age 50–80 said they have played an instrument at least a few times in the past year, and 8% played an instrument with other

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people at least occasionally. Among those who played an instrument, 14% usually and 34% occasionally played with others.

## Benefits and importance of music

Nearly all older adults (98%) stated they get some health-related benefit from music, most often stress relief or relaxation (75%). Other benefits of music included bringing joy (73%); improving mental health, mood, or attitude (65%); sparking memories or helping recall life events (61%); or becoming motivated or energized (60%).

In addition, many older adults said that music helps them feel a spiritual or religious connection (36%); the percentage was much higher among Black respondents (62%). Adults age 50–80 also reported that music helps keep their mind sharp (31%), connects them to others (27%), and reduces pain (7%).

Two in five adults age 50–80 (41%) reported that music is very important to them, 48% said it is somewhat important, and 11% said it was not important. Black and Hispanic respondents were more likely to consider music to be very important (over 50% in both groups).

When rating the importance of music now as compared to in their youth, 46% of older adults said that music has the same importance, 19% reported that music is more important now, and 35% said music is less important to them now.

## Implications

Music plays a role in the lives of almost all older adults, whether it is listening to a recording, attending a live performance, singing, or making music, either alone or with others. Almost all adults age 50–80 who engaged with music reported some health-related benefit from music.

The benefits—relaxation, stress relief, improvement in mood, and greater energy—could be especially helpful for those facing physical and mental health challenges. Health system and aging services leaders should consider ways to expand opportunities for older people to engage with music to support their health and well-being.

At a time when public support for the arts remains threatened, health care providers, policymakers, and community organizations should be aware of the important role that music plays in the lives of older adults. For many people, music is one of life's greatest pleasures!

## Data Source and Methods

This National Poll on Healthy Aging report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by NORC at the University of Chicago for the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation. National Poll on Healthy Aging surveys are conducted using NORC's AmeriSpeak probability-based panel. This survey module was administered online and via phone from July 17th–August 7th, 2023 to a randomly selected, stratified group of U.S. adults age 50–80 (n=2,657). The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. The completion rate was 50% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ±1 to 5 percentage points for questions asked of the full sample and higher among subgroups.

Findings from the National Poll on Healthy Aging do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

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