

The road to better exercise might be in your playlist

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Music may be just what you need to stick with an exercise program—and picking the right tunes could even improve performance.

Federal [exercise](#) guidelines recommend people get at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity, each week. For those who don't love the act of exercising, those totals can seem like a tall order.

But over the last decade, researchers have begun to build the case that [music](#) during exercise might just give an edge.

A recent study in the journal *Psychology of Sports and Exercise* concluded that listening to motivational music during sprint-interval training has the potential to not only improve the participants' level of enjoyment, but their performance as well.

"People I find who may have trouble staying with an [exercise program](#) or who begin one and quit

after a month may find this as a method to help them enjoy it," said Costas Karageorghis, one of the study's authors. "The real benefit of this type of research is that the more people you can direct toward a healthier lifestyle, the better."

In the study, the participants' peak power output and [heart rates](#) were higher when listening to motivational music than when listening to podcasts or to no audio. They also rated their [post-workout](#) enjoyment higher after listening to music.

Paige Cervantes, a professional trainer based in McKinney, Texas, said the right music affects her health and happiness, even on a tough day in the weight room.

"I know especially on days where I knew I was going to be lifting heavier, I felt my performance would improve when it was harder rock music," she said. "There was something about that beat and the guitar playing that would just kind of set the mood to where I could lift heavier and almost get to the point of getting a little angry."

Her choice for those workouts? A little heavy metal.

"That would kind of bring up the fight in me. Bubblegum music doesn't do much for me when I am trying to lift weights."

Karageorghis, a professor of sport and exercise psychology at Brunel University in London, said a good place to start is to look for playlists that feature music starting about 120 beats per minute (bpm), the pace of a brisk walk. Over time, as workouts intensify, the tempo of the music can increase as well, up to about 140 bpm.

"I find people who devote time and energy to creating playlists for their workouts actually enjoy their workout much more than those who just select music randomly," said Karageorghis, author of the

book *Applying Music in Exercise and Sport*. "Ideally, if you turn your playlist over every couple of weeks, it will keep it fresh. It will be more stimulating, and you're likely to derive greater athletic and psychological benefits than if you simply listen to the same playlist over and over."

But he warned to be wary of the volume.

"In many exercise facilities that I visit, the music is way above 80 decibels," he said. "If you're able to maintain a comfortable conversation with the person next to you, the music volume is probably about right."

His previous research shows even when people exercise beyond comfortable levels, such as at levels higher than 75% of their maximal heart rate, music can put them in a better mood—despite the associated fatigue or exhaustion—than when the workout includes no music.

Those [positive effects](#) on mood are important, said Russell Pate, an exercise science professor in the University of South Carolina's Arnold School of Public Health. Sticking with a workout routine, he said, depends on a lot of different factors, including support from family and friends.

"But the more positive it is, the greater the likelihood that they'll choose to do it again tomorrow and the day after that."

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