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Natural Fixes

Sound Therapy for Pain

BY HANNAH CHENOWETH

You've no doubt felt it: Whether it's Bach or Beyoncé, music can elicit a variety of reactions in your body and mind. Now some therapists are using that concept to help patients combat pain. Here, **Nada Milosavljevic, M.D.**, founder of the Integrative Health Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, CEO of Sage Tonic, and author of *Holistic Health for Adolescents*, explains how sound therapy works.

First, what exactly is sound therapy?

Sound therapy covers a range of treatments, from music therapy to sound baths. Like massage therapy, which delivers healing through touch, it's a form of sensory therapy, and it has been used by various cultural groups for centuries. The most prominent form practiced in the U.S. is music therapy, but the use of individual sounds

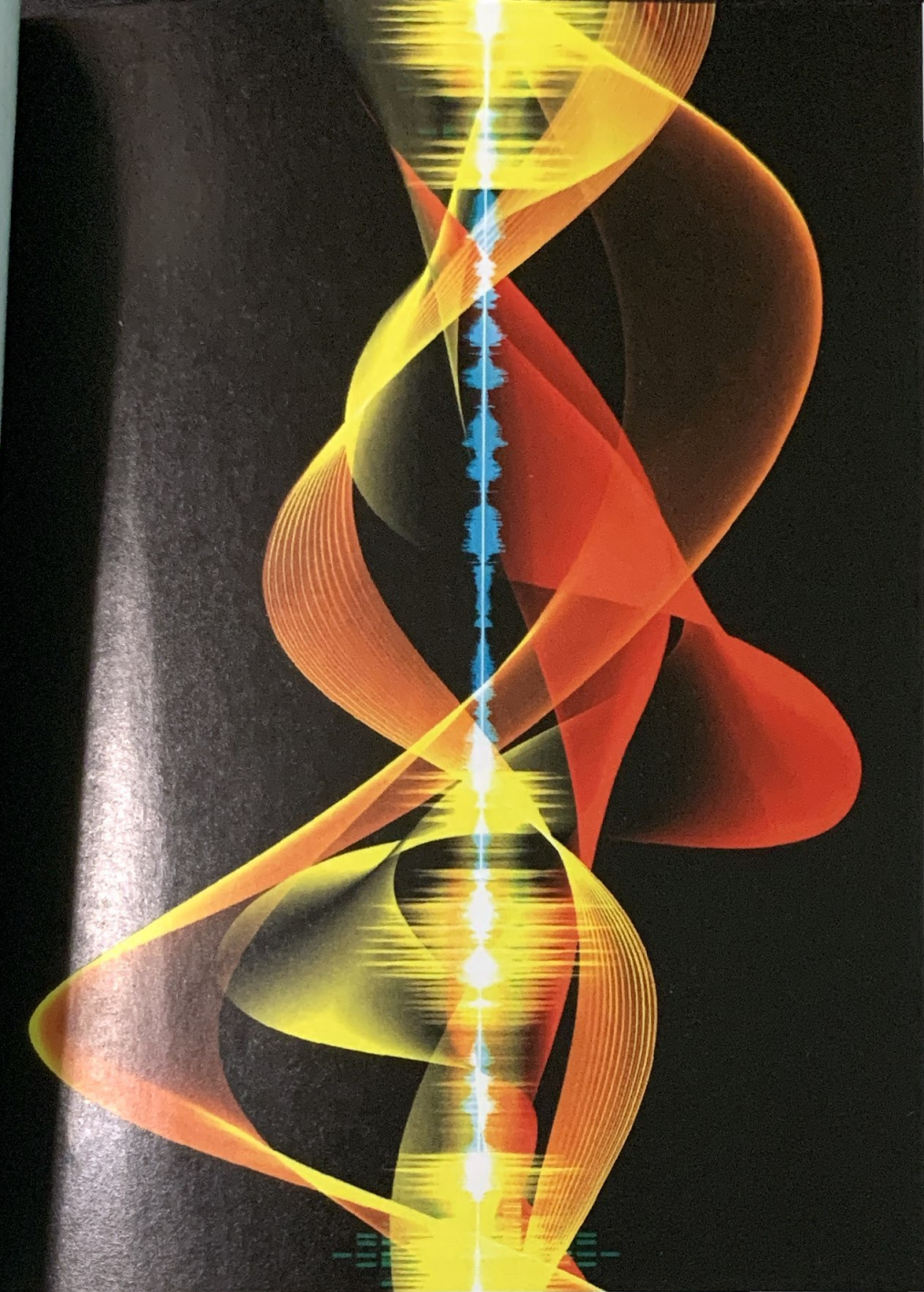
and frequencies has been growing. Essentially, sound and music are noninvasive, simple, and cost-effective therapeutic tools.

So what happens during a typical session?

It varies according to the goal. You might be asked to sit or lie down in a quiet room with soft, dim lighting. There are many ways to introduce sound—for instance, via live musical devices, headphones, or Tibetan sound bowls. This may be coupled with deep abdominal breathing, guided imagery, yoga, or tai chi.

What kinds of sounds work best?

It depends on the symptom or condition you want to target. If relaxation is the goal, the most beneficial sounds include ones with depth and slow melodies as well as songs with lower frequencies and slow transitions. Nature sounds such as



rain offer consistent “white noise,” which calms the nervous system. Pain conditions usually put the body in a state of stress, which is why some sound therapies for relaxation can also be applied to the treatment of pain. On the other hand, steady, upbeat, positive-sounding music can be used to increase energy.

How effective is sound therapy for pain relief?

A lot of compelling research supports sound therapy for relief of both

physical and psychological pain. For instance, one study found that it reduced pain and anxiety in children undergoing medical or dental procedures, while a large meta-analysis showed that sound and music could reduce anxiety and support a state of calmness in adults. Music also may decrease blood pressure and heart and respiratory rates, according to one report. While sound therapy isn't a cure-all for

most people with severe pain or stress, it's definitely beneficial.

Where can I find a sound therapy practitioner?

The American Music Therapy Association, a national organization, is a great resource for finding certified music and sound therapists. As sound therapy is often done in conjunction with other therapeutic treatments such as yoga, another option is to ask local studios for referrals.