

Drum Therapy

Therapeutic Effects of Drumming February 21, 2016

By Michael Drake

[Drum therapy](#) is an ancient approach that uses rhythm to promote healing and self-expression. From the shamans of Mongolia to the Minianka healers of West Africa, [therapeutic rhythm techniques](#) have been used for thousands of years to create and maintain physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Current research is now verifying the therapeutic effects of ancient rhythm techniques. Recent research reviews indicate that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system and produces feelings of well-being, a release of emotional trauma, and reintegration of self.

Other studies have demonstrated the calming, focusing, and healing effects of drumming on Alzheimer's patients, autistic children, emotionally disturbed teens, recovering addicts, trauma patients, and prison and homeless populations. Study results demonstrate that drumming is a valuable treatment for stress, fatigue, anxiety, hypertension, asthma, chronic pain, arthritis, mental illness, migraines, cancer, [multiple sclerosis](#), Parkinson's disease, stroke, paralysis, emotional disorders, and a wide range of physical disabilities.

Drumming Reduces Tension, Anxiety, and Stress

Drumming induces deep relaxation, lowers blood pressure, and reduces stress. Stress, according to current medical research, contributes to nearly all disease and is a primary cause of such life-threatening illnesses as heart attacks, strokes, and immune system breakdowns. A recent study found that a program of group drumming helped reduce stress and employee turnover in the long-term care industry and might help other high-stress occupations as well.¹

Drumming Helps Control Chronic Pain

Chronic pain has a progressively draining effect on the quality of life. Researchers suggest that drumming serves as a distraction from pain and grief. Moreover, drumming promotes the production of endorphins and endogenous opiates, the body's own morphine-like painkillers, and can thereby help in the control of pain.²

Drumming Boosts the Immune System

A recent medical research study indicates that drumming circles boost the immune system. Doctors Reveal 1 Weird Compound to Calm Anxiety That May Surprise You.

Led by renowned cancer expert Barry Bittman, MD, the study demonstrates that group drumming actually increases cancer-killing cells, which help the body combat cancer as well as other viruses, including AIDS. According to Dr. Bittman, "Group drumming tunes our biology, orchestrates our immunity, and enables healing to begin."³

Drumming Produces Deeper Self-Awareness by Inducing Synchronous Brain Activity

Research has demonstrated that the physical transmission of rhythmic energy to the brain synchronizes the two cerebral hemispheres. When the logical left hemisphere and the intuitive right hemisphere begin to pulsate in harmony, the inner guidance of intuitive knowing can then flow unimpeded into conscious awareness. The ability to access unconscious information through symbols and imagery facilitates psychological integration and a reintegration of self.

Drumming also synchronizes the frontal and lower areas of the brain, integrating nonverbal information from lower brain structures into the frontal cortex, producing “feelings of insight, understanding, integration, certainty, conviction, and truth, which surpass ordinary understandings and tend to persist long after the experience, often providing foundational insights for religious and cultural traditions.”⁴

Drumming Accesses the Entire Brain

The reason rhythm is such a powerful tool is that it permeates the entire brain. Vision for example is in one part of the brain, speech another, but drumming accesses the whole brain. The sound of drumming generates dynamic neuronal connections in all parts of the brain even where there is significant damage or impairment such as in Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). According to Michael Thaut, director of Colorado State University's Center for Biomedical Research in Music, “Rhythmic cues can help retrain the brain after a stroke or other neurological impairment, as with Parkinson's patients...” The more connections that can be made within the brain, the more integrated our experiences become.

Drumming Induces Natural Altered States of Consciousness

Rhythmic drumming induces altered states, which have a wide range of therapeutic applications. A recent study by Barry Quinn, Ph.D. demonstrates that even a brief drumming session can double alpha brain wave activity, dramatically reducing stress.⁵ The brain changes from Beta waves (focused concentration and activity) to Alpha waves (calm and relaxed), producing feelings of euphoria and well-being.

Alpha activity is associated with meditation, shamanic trance, and integrative modes of consciousness. This ease of induction contrasts significantly with the long periods of isolation and practice required by most meditative disciplines before inducing significant effects. Rhythmic stimulation is a simple yet effective technique for affecting states of mind.

Drumming Creates a Sense of Connectedness with Self and Others

In a society in which traditional family and community-based systems of support have become increasingly fragmented, [drumming circles](#) provide a sense of connectedness with others and interpersonal support. A drum circle provides an opportunity to connect with your own spirit at a deeper level, and also to connect with a group of other like minded people. Group drumming alleviates self-centeredness, isolation, and alienation.

Music educator Ed Mikenas finds that drumming provides “an authentic experience of unity and physiological synchronicity. If we put people together who are out of sync with themselves (i.e., diseased, addicted) and help them experience the phenomenon of entrainment, it is possible for them to feel with and through others what it is like to be synchronous in a state of preverbal connectedness.”⁶

Rhythm and resonance order the natural world. Dissonance and disharmony arise only when we limit our capacity to resonate totally and completely with the rhythms of life. The origin of the word rhythm is Greek meaning “to flow.” We can learn “to flow” with the rhythms of life by simply learning to feel the beat, pulse, or groove while drumming. It is a way of bringing the essential self into accord with the flow of a dynamic, interrelated universe, helping us feel connected rather than isolated and estranged.

Drumming Provides a Secular Approach to Accessing a Higher Power

[Shamanic drumming](#) directly supports the introduction of spiritual factors found significant in the healing process. Drumming and Shamanic activities produce a sense of connectedness and community, integrating body, mind and spirit. According to a recent study, “Shamanic activities bring people efficiently and directly into immediate encounters with spiritual forces, focusing the client on the whole body and integrating healing at physical and spiritual levels.

This process allows them to connect with the power of the universe, to externalize their own knowledge, and to internalize their answers; it also enhances their sense of empowerment and responsibility. These experiences are healing, bringing the restorative powers of nature to clinical settings.”⁸

Drumming Releases Negative Feelings, Blockages, and Emotional Trauma

[Drumming](#) can help people express and address emotional issues. Unexpressed feelings and emotions can form energy blockages. The physical stimulation of drumming removes blockages and produces emotional release. Sound vibrations resonate through every cell in the body, stimulating the release of negative cellular memories. “Drumming emphasizes self-expression, teaches how to rebuild emotional health, and addresses issues of violence and conflict through expression and integration of emotions,” says Music educator Ed Mikenas.

Drumming can also address the needs of addicted populations by helping them learn to deal with their emotions in a therapeutic way without the use of drugs.

Drumming Places One in the Present Moment

Drumming helps alleviate stress that is created from hanging on to the past or worrying about the future.

When one plays a drum, one is placed squarely in the here and now. One of the paradoxes of rhythm is that it has both the capacity to move your awareness out of your body into realms beyond time and space, and to ground you firmly in the present moment.

Drumming Provides a Medium for Individual Self-Realization

Drumming helps reconnect us to our core, enhancing our sense of empowerment and stimulating our creative expression. “The advantage of participating in a drumming group is that you develop an auditory feedback loop within yourself and among group members—a channel for self-expression and positive feedback—that is pre-verbal, emotion-based, and sound-mediated.”⁹ Each person in a drum circle is expressing themselves through his or her drum and listening to the other drums at the same time. “Everyone is speaking, everyone is heard, and each person’s sound is an essential part of the whole.”¹⁰ Each person can drum out their feelings without saying a word, without having to reveal their issues. Group drumming complements traditional talk therapy methods. It provides a means of exploring and developing the [inner self](#). It serves as a vehicle for personal transformation, consciousness expansion, and community building. The primitive drumming circle is emerging as a significant therapeutic tool in the modern technological age.

References

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