

exercise

Listen up...

Why music makes you fitter

It's been called the legal drug of sport – but how can music *really* make us hit new training highs? **Lucy Cheek** tunes in

Picture this: you're slogging it out in the final mile of a run. Your feet are aching, sweat is trickling down your cheeks and your mind is screaming 'stop!'. And suddenly your dream tune plays on your iPod. You know, the one that would make you climb up onto the bar and throw your best moves when you were 18, after a few too many glasses of, er, orange squash. The song that makes you go the extra mile – literally. Suddenly, your feet feel lighter, your legs stronger. Perhaps you even mouth the words and pump your fist for the entertainment of people walking their collies in the park. You finish with a smile instead of a scowl, buzzing with endorphins and energy.

Whether you're in a spinning class, lunging your life away or even swimming (yup, you can get underwater MP3 players now), there's no doubt that tunes have a powerful influence on your training. Long-distance legend Paula Radcliffe agrees, saying 'with the right music, I do a much harder workout'. There's now even a musical half marathon, *Run to the Beat*, which sees hundreds of joggers rocking out as they run. But, as we discover, there's more to it than just cranking up the volume when you need an extra push. Here's the science behind the sounds...

PERFECT MATCH

Music and exercise are destined to be together, according to Brunel University's Dr Costas Karageorghis, co-author of *Inside Sport Psychology*. He has spent more than 20 years studying the relationship between our ears and our feet and claims that music is sport's 'legal drug': 'When you are training at 75 per cent of your maximum heart rate, music can lower our perception of effort as we exercise by around ten per cent,' he explains. 'Also, in one study, treadmill exercisers who listened to music reported a 15 per cent gain in endurance over those who sweated in silence.' It can almost make fatigue feel pleasurable!

When it comes to group exercise or any kind of choreographed moves, such as step-ups or squats, women seem to derive more benefit from music than men, too, says Dr Karageorghis. This might be why you see more women than

men flocking to aerobics classes at the gym. Alan Holl, UK head of commercial fitness at Virgin Active Health Clubs, agrees: 'Women love group exercise classes such as *Zumba*, which uses music to create the atmosphere of a party as opposed to a stale old exercise routine – the music's loud, so you don't hear yourself puffing!'

JUST BEAT IT

A major element that contributes to music's effectiveness is rhythm response, which is related to the beats per minute (BPM) of the song. For medium-to-high-intensity cardio, a song with 120-140 BPM is effective. Examples include: Daft Punk's *Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger*; James Brown's *I Feel Good*; or Rihanna's *S&M*. You can also link your heart rate to BPM, so that the music tempo you listen to is five beats per minute above your heart rate. So if you run with a heart rate of 125 BPM, a track at 130 BPM would be perfect.

But how can you find the BPM of your top tunes? Handily, iTunes has an optional 'BPM' column. Or try *Tangerine* at www.itunes.com, which creates playlists for you by analysing the BPM of your tracks.

According to Dr Karageorghis, slower music can also boost performance, especially when it comes to stretching, yoga or any meditative exercise. 'Anything by Enigma or Alicia Keys, for example, can give you a sense of wellbeing and get you in the right mindset to work out,' he says. Listening to soothing tunes can also settle the nerves of women who suffer from pre-gym stress or social physique anxiety (showing bodies in a public place).

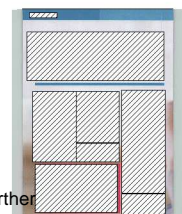
WHEN SILENCE IS GOLDEN

'Once you go beyond 75 per cent of your aerobic capacity, music effectiveness on performance is diminished,' says Dr Karageorghis. So, while fist-pumping tunes during high-intensity activities such as sprinting can still 'enhance your mood until the point of voluntary exhaustion', they won't be as effective as during medium-intensity activities.

'Never listen to music if you're crossing roads while running or cycling,' Dr Karageorghis also warns. Plus, look after your ears: music above 85 decibels can result in tinnitus and hearing loss.

Dr Karageorghis also says that, just like any drug,

you can become addicted to music, and this can result in being desensitised to it. 'In order to get the best fitness benefits from music, ditch your MP3 player every third workout,' he says. 'Use a song-free workout to listen to the sound of your breath and your body moving, and to relax your shoulders. Music can be so intoxicating that you may push yourself too hard and cause injury.' ❧



TOP RUNNING SOUNDTRACKS



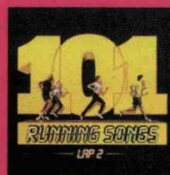
■ **The Workout Mix
5K + 10K Playlists**

Features buzz-boosting tracks by Lady Gaga and The Saturdays, plus a 5K training plan and a five-day Fitness First pass.
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■ **Ministry of Sound
Running Trax 2**

Whether it's a lazy Sunday jog or an off-road stride, this three-disc running buddy with bonus training booklet will spur you on.
£9, HMV



■ **101 Running Songs**

This CD has more than five hours of tunes to stride out to, from Gorillaz to David Guetta – 30-mile run, anyone?
£7.99, www.amazon.co.uk

'My ultimate track'



Four fitness buffs reveal the sounds they sweat by...



■ 'Like a Prayer by Madonna; it's upbeat with a burst of girl power that makes me dig that little bit

harder when I train.'
Hollie Avil, 21, GB triathlete and David Lloyd Team Family Campaign ambassador



■ 'When I'm flagging at the end of a long run, Brainstorm by the Arctic Monkeys makes me bolt home, no matter

how tired I am!'
Rebecca Lippett, 34, sales manager and fitness coach



■ 'Groove Armada's I See You Baby makes me shake my bum happily when on the cross-trainer; who cares if anyone's

watching me?!'
Lucy Ashman, 31, mum-of-two



■ 'I chill out with songs by Adele before a big game – I find it really helps me to relax and focus.'

Natalie Seymour, 25, GB hockey player

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