The Effect of Music Therapy on Cognitive Function in Patients With Mild Cognitive Impairment: A Systematic Review

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Background
- Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) may be reversible, so early interventions are imperative.
- Music therapy has received attention as an easily accessible and cost-effective treatment for people with MCI.

Purpose
The purpose of this review was to examine the effects of music therapy on cognitive function in older adults with MCI.

Methods
A systematic search of CINAHL, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science was performed using the keywords: music, music therapy, and cognition. Studies were analyzed using narrative synthesis.

Findings
- From 13 studies, a total of 760 older adults with MCI and 77 cognitively intact older adults were included.
- The type of music therapy and cognitive assessment tools varied in each study.
- Overall, music therapy had positive effects on at least one domain of cognitive function in people with MCI.
- Cacciafesta et al. (2010) demonstrated that specific music was more effective in improving cognitive function.
- Wang et al. (2019) demonstrated that longer period and multiple exposures to music therapy had greater effects than a short-term exposure.

Conclusions
Even though the evidence in the review is limited because of the varied types of assessments and interventions, music therapy can be recommended to help improve cognitive function in older adults with MCI.

Implications for practice and research
- This review suggests that regular and long-term music therapies can be used as a non-pharmacological and cost-effective intervention for people with MCI.
- Longitudinal designs would be well-suited to understanding how the improvements are seen after music therapy persists.
- Individualized music selection should be investigated more to establish robust evidence of its effectiveness on cognitive function and use it for cognitive rehabilitation.