

## Evening Playlist

Music can energize or calm the brain. Repetitive music has been used for centuries to induce trances and, more recently, its sleep-inducing effects have been explored. Relaxing music helps people fall asleep faster and improves sleep quality, according to the results of 20 controlled studies. Statistically speaking, these effects are in the moderate range, which is actually greater than the effects seen with sleep medication. In direct comparisons, music has outperformed progressive muscle relaxation, acupuncture, and audiobooks (Feng et al., 2018).

How does music do this? There are at least two possible mechanisms. Relaxing music reduces the fight-or-flight response, in turn lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones like cortisol. It can also distract from negative, anxious thoughts, which is a quality that's particularly useful in clients with depression. Indeed, a steady routine of evening music can improve both sleep and depression (Chan et al., 2010).

### How to Use Music for Sleep

Music can be integrated into an evening wind-down routine. Ideally, clients will start their sleep playlist 30-60 minutes before bed and listen while they fall asleep. They can program their music player to cut off in the late evening or keep playing; both methods have been successful in the research. Unlike sleep medicines, the benefits of music don't wear off with time. In fact, it has a slow build, so clients should give music a try for three to four weeks before deciding if it's helpful (Wang et al., 2014).

### Which Songs Work?

The exact songs need to be personalized, but qualities that make for a good snoozer include:

- Instrumental music with a regular rhythm
- Bass tones
- Tranquil melodies
- Familiar tunes
- Slow tempos (e.g., 60-80 BPM; You can check tempos of specific songs at [songbpm.com](http://songbpm.com))

### The Top 10 Sleep Tracks

In 2011, the instrumental group Marconi Union collaborated with the British Academy of Sound Therapy to create a track for sleep and relaxation. Using biofeedback, they adjusted the tones until they arrived at an eight-minute piece called *Weightless*. When sleep researchers tested the effectiveness of this soundtrack against other relaxing songs, *Weightless* rose to the top for its ability to induce sleep and relaxation. In particular, it lowered anxiety by a remarkable 65% and decreased other physical markers of stress, such as heart rate and blood pressure, as well (Curtin, 2017). The relaxing effects of this song were so dramatic that researchers had to caution against driving while listening to it. Other songs that were tested, in order of success, were:

1. *Weightless*, by Marconi Union
2. *Electra*, by Airstream
3. *Mellomaniac* (Chill Out Mix), by DJ Shah
4. *Watermark*, by Enya
5. *Strawberry Swing*, by Coldplay
6. *Please Don't Go*, by Barcelona
7. *Pure Shores*, by All Saints
8. *Someone Like You*, by Adele
9. *Canzonetta Sull'aria*, by Mozart
10. *We Can Fly*, by Rue du Soleil

All 10 songs are available on a public Spotify playlist: *Relaxing Songs* by Melanie Curtin. *Weightless* is also available free on YouTube, on CD, or through most streaming services. There is even a 10-hour version to last through the night, or clients can play the eight-minute track on repeat.

In addition to the top 10 playlist, clients can search online for terms like “relaxing playlists” or “sleep playlists” to personalize their evening playlist further. Research on music and sleep has favored the following genres in particular:

- Celtic harp
- Gregorian chants
- Electronic music
- New age music
- Classical music, including Indian and Chinese classical

Specific pieces:

- Beethoven, *Moonlight Sonata* and *Symphony No. 9 Movement 3*
- Satie, *Gymnopédie No. 1*
- Bach, *Air Suite No. 3 in D Major BWV 1068*
- Brahms, *Clarinet Quintet in B Minor*
- Debussy, *Clair De Lune*
- Pachelbel, *Canon in D*
- Mozart, *Serenade No. 10*
- Barber, *Adagio for Strings*
- Jules Massenet, *Méditation from Thaïs*
- Kitaro, *Lord of Wind*
- Yu-Xiao Guang, *Everlasting Road*

*Binaural beats* are another option. These electronic sounds are designed to induce different types of brainwaves. For sleep, research supports the role of 5 to 7 Hz *theta wave* binaural beats, which are associated with a state of deep relaxation. If clients don't like the electronic textures of binaural beats, they can try searching for “binaural beats nature.” Nature sounds like rain, wind, or the ocean can also help insomnia, as can white noise. Clients can use the following worksheet to experiment with different evening sounds and see what works best for them.

Client Worksheet

# Nighttime Music & Sounds

Relaxing music before bed improves sleep. It can be used both before and during sleep. Use the following worksheet to find out what types of music or sounds work best for you, and keep in mind there are always people who sleep better in silence.

Make a playlist of songs that could improve your sleep. Try natural sounds, white noise, and theta wave binaural beats as well. How does each method affect your sleep?

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If you have anxiety, racing thoughts, or wired energy at night, how does listening to an evening playlist affect those symptoms?

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How does listening to an evening playlist compare to silence?

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