

## **Ten Reasons to Drum for Your Health**

### **1. Drumming is for everyone**

Drumming does not require advanced physical abilities or specialized talents. It does not require participants to read music or understand music theory. Drumming, even a simple pattern, offers benefits to a huge range of people. Drumming is a universal language. It transcends gender, race, age, and nationality. In fact, nearly every culture on earth has some form of drumming tradition.

Furthermore, group drumming and drum therapy is currently being used for people with brain injuries or impairment, physical injuries, arthritis, addictions, and more. Studies are finding numerous health benefits from drumming for people with these conditions.

### **2. Drumming reduces stress and boosts the immune system**

Studies have shown that drumming lowers both blood pressure and stress hormones. The active component of drumming helps reduce stress in a number of ways. It's fun, it's physical, and it's a great diversion from other stress-filled activities. If you need to vent, what better way than to hit something?

Drumming is also meditative, inducing relaxed mental states that reduce anxiety and tension. Drumming combined with deep breathing and visualization techniques offers even more stress reduction benefits. "We know that stress takes a toll on the immune system," says Ann Webster, PhD. "When you're under stress, blood levels of stress hormones go up and your body is no longer able to make killer cells and other cells of the immune system in the amounts it normally would, and that can lead to disease progression. Reducing stress is very restorative. It gets the system back in balance."

A recent medical research study indicates that drumming does boost the immune system. According to cancer expert Barry Bittman, MD, the study demonstrates that group drumming actually increases cancer killing cells, which help the body fight cancer and other viruses.

### **3. Drumming produces deeper self-awareness by inducing synchronous brain activity (Hemispheric Coordination) and promoting alpha waves**

Studies of the human mind have found that the two sides of a human brain often work at different levels and at different rates. Drumming activates both sides of the brain and can help the mind achieve hemispheric coordination, a situation where both halves of the brain are active and brain waves are synchronized. This coordination can lead to integrative modes of consciousness, which may include greater insight or creativity.

Drumming also can increase alpha waves in the brain. The increased alpha activity can help drummers and others to calm their minds or even achieve a meditative state. Group drumming and its effect on alpha waves are now being used to help people with addictive personalities and people who are 'hypervigilant'.

### **4. Drumming helps to releases negative feelings and emotional trauma**

Drum therapy has successfully been used with patients and others suffering from emotional traumas including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Drumming can help people express and address emotional issues. The physical stimulation of drumming also 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.

### **5. Drumming helps us to connect with self and others**

Group drumming creates a sense of community and a powerful shared experience. It has been used as a successful team building experience to teach groups to work together, to listen to each other, and

to achieve common goals. Group drumming discourages isolation, and self-centeredness and promotes communication and involvement with the group. On a personal level, a drum circle also provides an opportunity to connect with one's own spirit at a deeper level. People who are sick, addicted, or afflicted with other conditions are out of sync with themselves. By putting these people in sync with themselves and with healthy individuals it is possible for them to feel and enjoy a healthier state of being.

#### **6. Drumming helps us connect to the natural rhythms all around us**

Rhythm is all around us though we are often unaware of it. The sun, moon, and the seasons follow regular rhythms. Our bodies have natural rhythms, which are a part of us every day. Natural rhythms rule us, even on a cellular level. Recent scientific 'string' theories even suggest that on a subatomic level, the smallest particle of the universe, that which makes up all things, is nothing more than tiny vibrating 'strings' and that their vibration, or rhythm, is what makes things what they are. Under this theory, everything is rhythm, literally.

Drumming connects us to rhythm, puts us in touch with natural cycles, and makes us aware of rhythm all around us.

#### **7. Drumming provides a path by which we may access a higher power**

Drumming produces a sense of spirituality, connectedness and community, integrating body, mind and spirit. By allowing participants to achieve a more relaxed, meditative mental state, drumming allows people to enter states of higher consciousness. Drumming can coordinate the brain's two hemispheres and synchronize the lower and frontal areas of the brain, which can lead to feelings of greater understanding and insight, which is often the basis for a person's connection to a higher power.

#### **8. Drumming grounds us in the present moment**

Drumming is interactive. It's about timing and coordination, both of which force participants to be in the present moment. This helps a person to be grounded in the present moment: When a person is firmly grounded in the present, stressful situations in the past are forgotten and worries of the future are minimized.

#### **9. Drumming helps us to reach a state of self-realization**

Drumming is a great form of self-expression. A drummer beats the drum and immediately receives feedback from the drum. This immediate feedback loop helps drummers achieve self-expression and self-realization. Drumming provides a method by which people can hear and be heard, a non-verbal language by which they can express themselves. The drummer is at once a useful part of the group and a unique individual.

#### **10. Drumming is fun**

Drumming releases endorphins in the human brain that cause feelings of happiness and euphoria. It's a great reason to gather with other people, to share in a common experience, and to do something enjoyable. A participant in a drum circle is part of a whole that is much greater than the sum of its parts, and drumming is accessible to an extremely wide range of people. Drumming is fun and that's the bottom line.

# The Benefits of Drumming

The word rhythm in Greek means to flow. Drumming is a path of healing that guides us into experiencing the flow of our mind and emotions so we may grow to experience more about our soul.

*Synced Rhythm, Masoud – Tanzania*

Drumming gives us an experience where we can be free to connect with ourselves and others, in order to release, restore and heal. It is a universal language where all people can be a part, free from words and concepts so we can experience life with an open heart.

Drumming supports individuals, families and communities during times of joy, sadness and change. As we drum together the rhythm can bring us closer to one another with respect and courage as we move towards healing wounds and restoring hope.

## Therapeutic Effects

Current research now shows the therapeutic effects of drumming techniques. Research indicates that drumming accelerates physical healing, boosts the immune system. In addition specific studies conducted by professionals in the fields of music therapy and mental health show us that drumming:

- Reduces tension, anxiety and stress
- Helps control chronic pain
- Boosts the immune system
- Releases negative feelings, blockages and emotional trauma

In a specific study conducted by Barry Bittman, MD, group drumming actually increases cancer-killing cells, which help the body combat cancer as well as many other viruses.

## Life Quality Effects

Drumming induces deep relaxation, lowers blood pressure, produces feelings of well-being, a release of emotional trauma and reduces stress.

Stress, according to current medical research, contributes to nearly all diseases and is a primary cause of such life-threatening illnesses as heart attacks, strokes and immune system breakdowns. Chronic pain, which many of our veterans experience, has a progressively draining effect on the quality of life.

Research suggests that drumming serves as a distraction from pain and grief. Specifically, drumming promotes the production of endorphins and endogenous opiates, the bodies own morphine-like pain killers, and can thereby help to control pain.

Living Resiliency

## Community Effects

Drum Circles also provide an opportunity for participants to feel connected with others and gain a sense of interpersonal support. A drum circle provides an opportunity to connect with your own spirit at a deeper level. Group drumming alleviates self-centeredness, isolation and alienation. There are great benefits to feeling connected to others, especially those in similar situations.

Specific studies show:

- Creates a sense of connectedness with self and others
- Helps us experience being in resonance with the natural rhythms of life
- Provides a medium for individual self-realization

# DRUM CIRCLE FACILITATION

DR. BRAD MEYER

*"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, and gaiety and life to everything. It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good, just, and beautiful, of which it is the invisible, but never less, dazzling, passionate, and eternal form."*

~Plato

There have been numerous studies done by Remo's HealthRHYTHMS division, the Yamaha Institute, the Mind-Body Wellness Center, and UpBeat Drum Circles on the health benefits of community drumming. Barry Bittman is a neurologist who has been in charge on many of the scientific studies that have been used to show how community drumming is beneficial in regards to: ***boosted immunity, stress reduction, exercising, self-expression, camaraderie and support, nurturing, spirituality, and music-making***

## **SET-UP:** *The Circle*

- Too many people -> several concentric circles
- Space between chairs -> freely while playing
- Create several paths -> for entering and exiting
- Good line of site to see the drum facilitator
- Wide variety of instruments -> divide the circle in half for side-to-side improvisations

## **INSTRUMENTS:**

**Types of Instruments** - bass drums, hand drums, mallet drums, pitch instruments, shakers, wood sounds, bells, tambourines, ambient instruments (rain stick, thunder tube, etc.)

**Mono-timbre** - having only one type of instrument to play

Advantage - participants are forced to come up with different ways of playing on instrument.

Disadvantage - musically, it can be hard to discern different rhythms and participants can become easily confused by their neighbors' rhythms.

**Multi-timbre** - having multiple instruments ranging from high to low and consisting of different materials (wood, metal, "skin," shakers, whistles, etc.)

Advantage - people with similar instruments can be paired up into smaller groups, and people who are less musically skilled can play softer instruments (shakers, ocean drums, rain stick, wind chimes, etc.).

Disadvantage - getting a lot of different instruments for a drum circle can be expensive and can also be a hassle to move if your transportation has limited space.

## **PERSONNEL:**

*Facilitator* - You are the facilitator most of the time. You are in charge of guiding the group towards short- and long-term goals, gauging group attentiveness, communicating upcoming events, devising "games" between groups and individuals, and pairing up less musically skilled persons with musically skilled persons.

*Greeters* - Welcome people as they enter, and remind people to take off their jewelry if they will be playing hand drums.

*Drum Distributors* - These are individuals that make sure each individual has an instrument; they also scan the drum circle looking for people who might not be enjoying the instrument they are currently playing. If this is the case, ask if they'd like to try another instrument, or see if they can switch with another person.

*Rhythm Allies* - People who you can count on to keep the group rhythmically together

## **DRUM CIRCLE PRINCIPLES:** from *The Art and Heart of Drum Circles*

- *There is no audience*
- *There is no rehearsal*
- *There is no right or wrong*
- *There is no teacher*
- *It is inclusive*
- *Spontaneity thrives*
- *It's about much more than drumming*

## **INTRODUCTION:** (Optional)

- *Stretching:* hands, wrist, and arms.
- *Relaxation:* keep shoulders low and relaxed
- *Jewelry:* remove any hand or wrist jewelry
- *Technique:* if there are hand drums, show how and where to hit properly strike the instruments; if they are using sticks, show them how to hold the sticks properly and where they should strike the instrument
- *Volume:* remind everyone that playing too hard can damage the instruments as well as their hearing by demonstrating a good volume



## **TWO TYPES OF DRUM CIRCLES:** *Short-term and Long-term*

**Short-term (5-15 minutes)** - one "event"

### Drum Circle Instructional Methods:

- *Call and Response* - The simplest way to demonstrate rhythmic patterns, different sonic options from instruments, and dynamics.
- *Metaphoric Teaching* - Utilizing different metaphors to represent aspects of performing on an instrument. Example:
- *Say It-Play It* - Vocalizing patterns, pitches, and tones through different syllables and phrases.
- *Written Music* - Giving everyone music to read from and then arranging the musical ensemble either prior to the performance or during the performance

	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Bell	•		•		•	•		•
High Drum		•	•		•		•	•
Low Drum	•		•		•	•	•	

**Long-term (15+ minutes)** - Multiple "events"

- It's great to start with a "short-term" drum circle. Then, when finished, do some musical team building exercises:

*Facilitator Exchange* - Have someone in the group be the facilitator, and make them then hand off their duties to someone else after a minute or two.

*Circular Rhythms* - Create a small one or two beat rhythm and "pass" it in one direction around the circle. After it makes one revolution, speed up the rhythm. Keep speeding up the rhythm until it disintegrates. Then, do a smaller rhythm that is only a half a beat or one beat long. Speed it up like the first rhythm. Finally, do one single note and pass that around the circle. If the circle has several rows behind it, first discuss how the rhythm will be passed from one circle to the next so there is no confusion.

*Hand Squeezer* - This is a great silent game that can bring a welcome break to the loud, bombastic nature of most drum circles. Have everyone hold the hand of the people next to him or her, creating one giant circle (if there are multiple rows to the circle, make sure that the connection from one circle to the next makes one large continuous chain instead of several smaller chains) and tell them to close their eyes for this exercise (the facilitator should keep their

eyes open to assess the progress of this exercise. Squeeze the hand of the person on your right, that person will then squeeze the hand of the person on their right, etc. After one or two tries, then try sending the hand squeeze to the right and then another squeeze to the left at the same time.

*Kinesthetic Simon Says* - Touch different parts on the body in rhythm creating a kind of impromptu dance. Start of with touch two different locations on the body, in a regular tempo, and then slowly add other locations to the initial two.

*Stomp* - This exercise is based the percussive "step competitions" that utilize the body as the instrument of choice. Make sure to use all sorts of sounds including: slapping, clapping, vocal sounds, clicking, stomping, and even motions that do not make sound.

## **GROOVE WRECKERS:**

*Show-Offs* - Give them their moment to shine, applaud them, and offer them a new important role, like a bass drum. They CAN be your key rhythm allies or your worst nightmare.

*Oblivious/"Heads-Down" Drummers* - Instead of signaling them out, ask everyone in the drum circle to practice "heads-up" drumming and look across the circle to find a "rhythm partner."

*Loud Participants* - Offer softer mallets instead of stick to quiet their sound, or a softer instrument such as a hand drum, shaker, or thunder tube.

*Constantly Speeding Up* - Set a "speed limit," by creating a signal or literally a sign to indicate when the group has gotten too fast and needs to slow down. This will help participants who cannot play rhythms as quickly as others. Or, give less musically skilled participants easier parts that they can succeed at performing.

*Out-of-Control Children* - Remind parents to keep an eye on their children. Having the parents playing next to their children can subdue most unruly children.

## **SMILE!**

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