

Guidelines for playing music for your baby

Welcome to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)/Special Care Nursery (SCN)! I'm Adam Sankowski, one of the music therapists at Mass General for Children (MGfC).

It is normal if you find this time to be stressful and perhaps unexpected for you and your family. Listening to music can help you manage your own levels of stress and provide appropriate developmental stimulation for your baby. Developmental stimulation includes activities that help your baby grow and develop, such as listening to music. If music is already a part of you and your family, you are encouraged to use it here as well.

Your new little one's ears are sensitive and still developing. It is important to follow these best practices when playing music for your baby. If you have any questions after reading this, reach out to me or another MGfC music therapist or ask your nurse to place a consult for Music Therapy. We will be happy to answer any questions you might have.

How often can my baby listen to music?

How often your baby listens to music depends on their **gestational age** (how far along a baby is based on the birthing parent's pregnancy) and whether they are receiving treatment with different types of equipment, such as a **ventilator** (breathing machine) or incubator. No matter your baby's age, remember that less is more. Use music thoughtfully and for short durations of time.

Age/Condition	Duration
Under 28 weeks gestation	Not recommended for auditory (hearing) stimulation
Babies in incubators Babies on ventilator	Check with your baby's nurse before listening to music.
29-31 weeks gestation	10-15 minutes per hour or less. Carefully monitor (watch) your baby for signs of overstimulation (when your baby experiences too much stimulation)
32-37 weeks gestation	30 minutes per hour or less, presented as your baby tolerates (enjoys). If your baby shows signs of distress or overstimulation, decrease listening time and watch them closely.
>38 weeks gestation	30 minutes per hour or less , based on the needs and stability of your baby

Adapted from "Guidelines for Music Listening in the Special Care Nurseries." *Music Therapy Perspectives* (2003) Vol.21. 9/27/15

What are some tips to follow when my baby listens to music?

- If you already have music that you enjoy listening to that would not be overstimulating to your baby, you are encouraged to use that. Music that is loud, has loud drums or has a loud rhythm (beat) can be overstimulating. If you are looking for suggestions on music for babies, Music Therapy at MGfC has a playlist available on Spotify®. The Music Therapy team chose this music based on the following characteristics: a steady speed or tempo; consistent volume; a structured organized form; soothing and comforting.
- Play music below the volume of typical quieter speech. Use your best judgment to figure out the volume of the music. You can also use a decibel (dB) meter app. Play music at or below 55 decibels (dB) (A scale) or 65-75 dB (C scale). This is very quiet. If you have a smart phone or tablet, there are many free decibel reader apps for both Android® and iPhone®. When using a decibel reader app, measure the sound as it plays near at your baby's ears, not directly from the sound source (such as a speaker or musical instrument).
- Avoid playing the radio. This includes internet radio or streaming apps or sites with ads, like YouTube® or Pandora®. Music on a radio is not consistent in the music selections or volume. It also has unpredictable advertisements or announcements.
- Do not play music continuously. Music is best used right before and after care times when your baby is alert. You may like to sing along to a favorite song with your baby. Or you might play a lullaby as they are falling asleep.

When to play music

- When your baby is fussy or agitated and is having difficulty falling asleep. Some very soft, slow lullabies may be helpful.
- Sing to your baby. Even if you do not consider yourself musical or a singer, babies LOVE to hear your voice, even if your voice is playful or sing-songy. Research shows that singing to your baby helps with their development.

When to stop music

- If your baby shows any signs of overstimulation, such as a startle reflex, increased heart rate, etc.
- When your baby falls asleep. Do not leave music on continuously while your baby is sleeping. Their still-developing ears need to rest.
- When the environment is noisy or there is a large amount of background noise already.



How do I find and use the MGfC Spotify® playlists?

- **If you already have a paid Spotify® account**, you can access and use the playlists by scanning the QR codes with your smart device or a QR code scanning app.
- **If you do not have a Spotify® account**, sign up for a trial account. It should be free from ads for 30 days. If possible, avoid free accounts because the ads can be very loud.
- **If you have already used up your free trial account**, please reach out to your baby’s music therapist to check if you can get a Spotify® gift card. Spotify® gift cards from your baby’s music therapist are available to everyone while supplies last. If gift cards are not available, ask your baby’s music therapist about other options.

About the Spotify® playlists

Use your smart device or a QR code scanner app to scan the QR code(s) to access the playlists above for your baby on Spotify®.

- This music has been specially selected for infants in the NICU/SCN because of the music’s tempo, consistency and mood.
- Use the QR code above or when in Spotify search “MGH Music Therapy”. Using the QR code is the easiest and quickest way to get to the playlist.
- If using the QR code is not an option, once at the MGfC Spotify® profile, click on “Playlist.” Scroll down to either of the NICU/ SCN playlists and select the one with or without vocals.
- Please have your medical team put in a music therapy consult if you have any questions about your baby listening to music, or if you have any questions about any of the listening guidelines above.

Instrumental



Songs with vocals

