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Effects of music listening on stress and skin barrier recovery – preliminary results

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Music is known to be effective in reducing stress, but whether it may also affect health is still open. We examined whether music listening after a stressor accelerates skin barrier recovery (SBR) after impairment, and whether this effect is mediated by stress reduction.

Acute stress was induced in female participants using the Trier Social Stress Test, and followed by either 30 minutes of music listening or one of two control conditions (audiobook, silence). We collected subjective and physiological (heart rate) stress markers, and used tape stripping to impair the skin barrier, followed by repeated transepidermal water loss measurements to assess SBR.

Preliminary data from the first consecutive participants (n=23) indicate that music enhances relaxed positive affect and calm mood more than silence. Music did not affect subjective stress, heart rate or skin barrier recovery more strongly than an audiobook or silence.

Although findings from the current small sample should be interpreted with extreme caution, our paradigm is a promising tool for studying the effects of brief experimental manipulations on health. Analyses from a larger sample will be presented at the conference.

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