

MUSIC AND THE MIND

By **CHRISTINE GORMAN**

REMEMBER THE SILLY TUNES FROM summer camp? The songs that were popular when you were courting? Or the hymn that was sung when your best friend died? Life without music would be pretty dull, and sometimes we lose sight of how powerful melody and rhythm can be in the realm of medicine, particularly with respect to Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.

No one is suggesting that music can reverse Alzheimer's disease or the slow destruction of brain cells that causes it. But this November, as yet another National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month rolls by without a cure, and people continue to live with—and die from—this terrible condition, it's a good time to think about the quality of life of patients and their families. To that end, more and more nursing homes and hospitals are finding that working with a music therapist can make a big difference.

One of the greatest struggles caregivers face is trying to relate to a loved one with Alzheimer's—especially in the later stages of the disease, when you can enter a room and have your own mother hide under the covers. Singing or humming as you walk in can ease your entry. "People with Alzheimer's often respond to music when they respond to nothing else," says Suzanne Hanser, chair of music therapy at Berklee College of Music in Boston. After all, if someone is singing, everything must be O.K.

Transitions—from day to evening, from one room to another—are another big challenge, says Alicia Clair, director of music education and therapy at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Music therapists work with family members and other caregivers to choose familiar songs—such as *Home on the Range*—to calm the agitation.

The American Music Therapy Association (musictherapy.org) can provide a list of qualified professionals in your area. But don't be afraid to do a little singing or whistling on your own. "If you can't think of what to do, sit and read to your loved one," Clair says. "And if you read poetry, it's almost like singing." ■



ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY SHINO ARIHARA

Can you reach Alzheimer's patients in song?



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