

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Mental Advantages of Early Musical Training

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



Can learning to play a musical instrument make you smarter? According to several recent studies, the answer is a resounding yes, provided the musical education takes place early in life.

Researchers from Long Island University recently published a report in the journal *Psychology of Music* which evaluated two groups of elementary school children whose educational experience differed only in that one group received vigorous musical training. The group that was exposed to music learned to play a keyboard instrument and read music. Their training started in the second grade and continued for three years.

At the completion of the three-year period, the two groups of students were tested to assess their reading skills. The results were dramatic. Those students who were exposed to musical training performed far better in a variety of skills related to reading and showed significantly better vocabulary development compared to children having a similar educational experience, but without the benefit of musical instruction.

Dr. Joseph M. Prio, the study's author, explained his theory as to why musical training was so advantageous for reading, saying that successful reading requires the development of the appropriate brain pathways to allow an understanding of correct sequencing of words. Musical training, he reasoned, provided the perfect mental framework for this goal as getting notes in the right order in a song was akin to understanding the right order of words on the written page.

His research, as well as that of others, emphasizes the importance of getting music training early in life while the brain connections are still being made.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".