



Music Playlist Guide

Familiar Songs That Spark Memories and Bring Joy

Why Familiar Music Matters

For many people living with dementia, music from their teens and young adulthood often remains deeply familiar. Songs from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s can stimulate long-term memories, encourage singing, reduce anxiety, and create joyful social moments.

Research suggests that personally meaningful music activates several areas of the brain associated with memory, emotion, and movement, even in later stages of dementia.

Choosing the Right Songs

- ✓ Choose music from the person's younger years (approximately ages 15–30).
- ✓ Keep the volume comfortable.
- ✓ Select songs with clear melodies and familiar lyrics.
- ✓ Encourage singing, clapping, or gentle movement.
- ✓ Watch their reactions and adjust the playlist accordingly.

Songs from the 1940s

Swing & Big Band

- Glenn Miller – In the Mood
- Glenn Miller – Moonlight Serenade
- The Andrews Sisters – Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy
- Bing Crosby – Swinging on a Star
- Vera Lynn – We'll Meet Again

Traditional Pop

- Nat King Cole – Nature Boy
- Frank Sinatra – You'll Never Know
- Doris Day – Sentimental Journey

Songs from the 1950s

Classic Pop

- Doris Day – Que Sera, Sera
- Patti Page – Tennessee Waltz
- Perry Como – Catch a Falling Star

Early Rock & Roll

- Elvis Presley – Love Me Tender
- Elvis Presley – Can't Help Falling in Love
- Buddy Holly – Everyday
- Chuck Berry – Johnny B. Goode

Country

- Hank Williams – Your Cheatin' Heart
- Patsy Cline – Walkin' After Midnight

Songs from the 1960s

Folk

- Simon & Garfunkel – The Sound of Silence
- Peter, Paul and Mary – Leaving on a Jet Plane

Motown

- The Temptations – My Girl
- The Supremes – Baby Love
- Marvin Gaye – How Sweet It Is

Pop Classics

- The Beatles – Hey Jude
- The Beatles – Yesterday
- Louis Armstrong – What a Wonderful World
- Neil Diamond – Sweet Caroline

Gospel & Hymns

Many older adults find comfort in faith-based music they have known for decades.

Examples include:

- Amazing Grace
- How Great Thou Art
- Great Is Thy Faithfulness
- In the Garden
- The Old Rugged Cross

Songs That Encourage Participation

Choose music that naturally invites people to sing, clap, or move along.

Examples:

- You Are My Sunshine
- Que Sera, Sera
- This Land Is Your Land
- Sweet Caroline
- My Girl
- Side by Side
- Take Me Out to the Ball Game

Tips for Volunteer Musicians

Keep performances interactive.

Invite residents to:

- 🎵 Sing along
- 👏 Clap
- 👣 Tap their feet
- 👯 Sway gently
- 😊 Share memories connected to the songs

Be Flexible

If one song doesn't connect, try another style or era. Every resident has unique musical preferences and life experiences.

Watch for Emotional Responses

Music can evoke powerful emotions. Some residents may smile, sing, cry, or become reflective. These responses are natural and often meaningful.

Create Personalized Playlists

Whenever possible, ask residents or family members:

- Favourite singer
- Favourite band
- Favourite hymn
- Wedding song
- Songs from military service
- Childhood favourites
- Cultural or regional music

Personalised playlists are often the most meaningful.

Remember

The goal isn't to perform a perfect concert—it's to create moments of recognition, comfort, and connection through familiar music.

References & Resources

Alzheimer's Association

<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/music-and-art-therapy>

How music can improve quality of life for people living with dementia.

Music & Memory

<https://musicandmemory.org>

Evidence-based personalised music programmes for older adults.

National Institute on Aging

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-and-dementia>

Information on activities, engagement, and quality of life.

Playlist for Life

<https://www.playlistforlife.org.uk>

Guidance on creating meaningful personal music playlists for people living with dementia.

Dementia Australia

<https://www.dementia.org.au>

Resources on music, reminiscence, and person-centred care.