

Troops Strike Up a Tune to Repair the Damage of Brain Injuries

By Andrew Rosenblum Posted 12.11.2009 at 10:20 am



Band Aid Music could provide relief to hundreds of brain-injured veterans. *Hanan Isachar/Superstock*

The opening riff of "Takin' Care of Business" thumps rhythmically from an iPod as a room full of middle-aged military veterans tap in time on drums. This is the sound of brain rehab.

Studies show that music can promote new neural connections, which Colorado State University neuroscientist Michael Thaut theorized could help overcome common symptoms of traumatic brain injury (TBI), such as short-term memory loss and impaired decision-making skills. Thaut and his colleagues enrolled 31 veterans suffering from TBI in a "neurologic music therapy" study where each drummer matches rhythms and tempos set by a bandleader. Last summer, they published results that show that after several 30-minute sessions, the group performed better on standard decision-making tests.

One beneficiary of the treatment is retired U.S. Air Force senior master sergeant Jim Dowding. After two stress-related strokes—a common non-combat cause of TBI—he didn't dare take a wrench to his beloved 1979 Lincoln. "I couldn't work on anything with more than two pieces," Dowding says. But since he began drumming, "I work on my car all the time."

Next Thaut and his team will compare the long-term effects of the therapy with today's computer-based therapies. He hopes to eventually offer it to the hundreds of troops returning from war with TBIs.

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