

THE HEALTHY MUSICIAN:

Taking Care of your Mind and Body

Performance Injuries

Like athletes, musicians perform for the public; and like athletes, musicians face the potential of injuries that can be devastating to their performance career. Published calculations report that as many as 76% of orchestra musicians have suffered, or will suffer, some debilitating condition which will affect their ability to perform on their instruments.

What Instrumentalists Should Do

Anyone who performs on a musical instrument has the potential to suffer injury related to that activity. Instrumental musicians are at risk for repetitive motion injuries. Sizable percentages of them develop physical problems related to playing their instruments; and if they are also computer users, their risks are compounded. Instrumental injuries often include carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, and bursitis. Incorrect posture, non-ergonomic technique, excessive force, overuse, stress, and insufficient rest contribute to chronic injuries that can cause great pain, disability, and the end of careers.

(Source: The University of Nevada Las Vegas)

Here are 8 ways to reduce the risk of performance injuries:

1. **Evaluate your technique.** Reduce force, keep joints in the middle of their range of motion, use large muscle groups when possible, and avoid fixed, tense positions.
2. **Always warm up.** As an athlete would not begin a vigorous physical activity without warming up, a musician must warm up carefully before practice or performance.
3. **Take breaks to stretch and relax.** Take short breaks every few minutes and longer breaks each hour. Two or more shorter rehearsals each day are more productive than marathon single sessions. Even in performance, find those opportunities to relax a hand, arm, or embouchure to restore circulation.
4. **Pace yourself.** *No pain, no gain* is a potentially catastrophic philosophy for a musician. Know when enough is enough, and learn to say 'no' to certain performances or lengths of performing that might result in injury.
5. **Check out your instrument.** Does your instrument place undue stress on your body? Is your instrument set up optimally for you to relieve pressure on hands, joints, etc.? Is there a strap, carrier, or stand available to relieve the stress?
6. **Evaluate other activities.** Pains and injuries affecting your music making could be caused by other activities in your daily life. Computer use is notorious for causing afflictions including carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis.
7. **Pay attention to your body.** Pain is the mechanism by which your body tells you that something is wrong. Listen to your body; if it hurts, stop what you are doing.

8. **Get medical attention.** Do not delay in seeing a doctor. A physician may prescribe a minor adjustment or, in worst-case scenarios, stipulate not performing for a period of time. As drastic as this may sound, a few months of rest is better than suffering a permanent, career ending injury.

(Source: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and the Canadian Network for Health in the Arts)

What Singers Should Do

Likewise, the demands placed on singers' voices are immense. Hardly a month goes by where a top singer is not forced to interrupt a tour, take a break, or undergo a medical procedure due to problems with their voice. Medical professionals are making the case that the demands put on one's voice when singing one to three hours is as intense as those made on an Olympic marathon runner's body. Additional factors such as nutrition, smoking, drug use, noisy environments, and proper voice training (or the lack of it) all play a role in a singer's ability to perform at her/his best. Your body is your instrument.

1. **Maintain good general health.** Get adequate rest to minimize fatigue. If you do become ill, avoid "talking over your laryngitis" - see your physician and rest your voice.
2. **Exercise regularly.** Singing is an aerobic activity.
3. **Eat a balanced diet.** Including vegetables, fruit and whole grains, and avoid caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, and soft drinks) and alcohol. Avoid spicy, acidic, and dairy foods if you are sensitive to them.
4. **Maintain body hydration;** drink two quarts of water daily.
5. **Avoid dry, artificial interior climates.** Las Vegas has an average daily humidity of 36%, a relatively low amount of moisture. Using a humidifier at night might compensate for the dryness.
6. **Limit the use of your voice.** High-ceilinged restaurants, noisy parties, cars and planes are especially damaging to the voice. If necessary, use amplification for vocal projection.
7. **Avoid throat clearing and coughing.**
8. **Stop yelling,** and avoid hard vocal attacks on initial vowel words.
9. **Adjust the speaking pitch level of your voice.** Use the pitch level varying by at least an interval of a fifth. Ladies—use your head voice.
10. **Speak in phrases rather than in paragraphs.** Breathe slightly before each phrase.
11. **Reduce demands on your voice** – don't do all the talking!
12. **Learn to breathe silently** to activate your breath support muscles and reduce neck tension.
13. Take full advantage of the two free elements of vocal fold healing: water and air.
14. Vocal athletes must treat their musculoskeletal system as do other types of athletes; therefore, **vocal warm-ups should always be used prior to singing.** Vocal cool-downs are also essential to keep the singing voice healthy.
15. Diagnose and treat allergies.

(Source: The Singer's Resource, the Texas Voice Center, Houston, and the University of Michigan Vocal Health Center)

What All Musicians Should Do

Stay informed. Awareness is the key. Like many health-related issues, prevention is much easier and less expensive than cures. Take time to read available information concerning injuries associated with your art.

Resources

Use the following links and books below to help you stay informed:

Conable, Barbara. What Every Musicians Needs to Know About the Body (GIA Publications, 2000)

Klickstein, Gerald. The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness (Oxford, 2009)

Norris, Richard N. The Musician's Survival Manual (International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, 1993)

The National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA) have developed a comprehensive set of jointly authored advisory documents on neuromusculoskeletal and vocal health for musicians. Information of a medical nature is provided by PAMA: information regarding contextual issues in music programs, by NASM. Visit this link ([NASM-PAMA](#)) for more information on Neromusculoskeletal Health and Vocal Health.

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), the world's leading authority on musical assessment, actively supporting and encouraging music learning for all www.abrsm.org

Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA), an organization comprised of dedicated medical professionals, artists educators, and administrators with the common goal of improving the health care of the performing artist. www.artsmed.org

Texas Voice Center, founded in 1989 for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of voice disorders. www.texasvoicecenter.com

National Center for Voice and Speech (NCVS), conducts research, educates vocologists, and disseminates information about voice and speech. www.ncvs.org

Vocal Health Center, University of Michigan Health System, recognized locally, regionally and nationally as a leading institution for the treatment and prevention of voice disorders. At the heart of the Center is a professional team comprised of experts from the University of Michigan Health System and U-M School of Music, encompassing the fields of Laryngology, Speech Pathology, and Vocal Arts. <http://www.med.umich.edu>

[Practice-Perfect.com](#) A resource for books relating to mental imagery.

[University of Chicago Library](#) Contains a short list of books on performance issues. There are several resources geared toward percussionists. Includes a couple of useful links as well.

[Van Cott Information Services](#) A fabulous resource for books on all things related to music. This link takes you to the General Music section where you will find many books on performance health.

[DanceMed](#) A dance site with a page relating to musicians. Contains a brief history of musician's injuries, as well as a broad overview of different injuries and some treatment options.

[Electric Blues Club](#) Another exhaustive collection of information. Includes a few items specific to the flute.

[musicbooksplus.com](#) This site is geared toward teaching materials - has lots of fun things for kids. This link takes you to the Musician's Health page.

[Essential Musical Intelligence](#) Music therapy based on eastern philosophies. Offers books and sample exercises.

[International Arts Medicine Association](#) A non-profit organization dedicated to communication between arts and health professionals.

[Ithaca College - Performing Arts Medicine](#) Interesting articles on performance injuries and remedies.

[John Lunn Flutes - Performance Health Links](#) A list of useful links for performance health.

[Kun Shoulder Rest Website - Musician's Health Page](#) This site is focused on violinists and violists, but the health page contains good general information.

[The Laban Ring](#) A page full of links to Laban-related sites.

[The Strad](#) A recent study of professional orchestral musicians in Australia found that 50 per cent currently experience pain when playing. In this article from the April 2011 issue of The Strad, Janet Horvath gives some essential guidance on how to avoid injury and ensure a long and healthy career.

[Musicians' Clinics of Canada](#) Offers treatment for all music-related injuries to people in Canada and the US. Headquartered in Hamilton, Ontario.

Musician's Wellness A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of performing musicians. Offers workshops & training at varying levels. Site includes some interesting articles.

North American Folk Music & Dance Alliance

Comprehensive listing of many useful links for performance health

University of Nebraska - Lincoln Campus Exhaustive group of resources for repetitive strain injuries.

Undergraduate Music Student Stress and Burnout A thesis from San Jose State University

“In the university music atmosphere, stress and burnout are prevalent and accepted as part of the culture. Symptoms and causes of general stress and burnout have been well researched, but much less has been presented on college musicians' burnout, let alone how to deal with it. This study examines the sources of stress, burnout, and ways of coping for undergraduate music students.”

Health Conditions, Attitudes Toward Study, and Attitudes Toward Health at the Beginning of University Study: Music Students in Comparison with Other Student Populations

“The goal of the present study was to investigate the prevalence of physical and psychological health problems and of subject-related complaints, attitudes toward the major subject, and health attitudes of music, psychology, medical, and sports students at the beginning of their university studies.”

Hearing Health

http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/PAMA-NASM_Advisories/4a_NASM_PAMA-Student_Guide-Standard.pdf

<http://otolaryngology.med.miami.edu/ear-institute/audiology/hearing-conservation-for-musicians/>

<http://performingarts.uncg.edu/mri/research-areas/hearing-health#hearconpol>

<http://www.etymotic-media.com/sliderule/>

Healthy Exercises and Techniques

[Alexander Technique](#)

[Applied Kinesiology](#)

[Aston Patterning](#)

Body Mapping

Body-Mind Centering

Chiropractic for Musicians

Feldenkrais Method

Hellerwork

Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies

Massage

Mental Imagery

Myofascial Release

Pilates

Rolfing

Rosen Method

Shiatsu

Somatic Movement Therapy

Yoga