

Playing Healthy: Suggestions for a long career without aches and pains

*Pay attention to aches **before** they become pains, and then injury*

Set-up:

- Customize: instrument should fit your unique anatomy, have IT meet YOU

Music Stand:

- Chamber music: raise stand to the highest level and still be able to see other players
- Orchestra: agree with partner on highest possible level for both, in line with conductor
- Practice at home: raise to eye level!

Chairs/Sitting:

- Keep the natural curves of your back & neck. A good chair makes it easy to maintain these curves.
- The chair should fit so you have the option to use the backrest. A footstool may help.
- Keep feet grounded: what are your toes and legs doing?

Self-Videotaping

- Look for neutral position; 1) Playback with sound off to see body mechanics unbiased;
- 2) Playback without looking at video, just listening, to hear if you can tell a difference between two different ways of playing. (* You can also do this with just audio record.)

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Warm-up: Get your heart rate up to improve circulation throughout the body.

- Examples: Stair climbing, jumping jacks, running in place, fast walking

Exercises:

- Periodically stretch to the opposite position from where you play
- Arm raise exercise, head retraction, play with back to door jamb, open hand and extend fingers
- Pure daily walking: no distractions, carrying, shopping, cell phones, or dog-walking

Breaks:

- Take breaks BEFORE symptoms appear. Time your playing to accomplish this.
- Take a 1-2 min. break every 20-30 min of playing, to avoid the buildup of tension
- Do the same on computer (use a timer or Timeout app)
- Stretch to opposite from where you play; walk, or do arms up exercise

in Rests:

- Put the instrument down: rest it on your thigh or lap.

Carrying your instrument:

- Lightest case possible, no extra music!
- Hold straps in front, switch shoulders
- Avoid standing static with your instrument. Put it down when talking to a friend.

Practicing: "Less is more"

- Don't repeat anything without changing something!
- Practice with 100% expression. Simulate performance.
- Practice only what you DON'T do well, for efficiency.

Accept nerves and "mistakes": playing carefully causes tension!

Embrace Risk!

Risk Factors for Injuries

How far and how often are you "out of neutral"? Do you have symptoms when you are in this out-of-neutral alignment? If so, you can improve these symptoms by adopting a new movement pattern that is closer to "neutral".

Risk factors for "out of neutral":

Head position

Side bent to the left too much, too often

In front of the shoulders, so that your ear is forward of your shoulder

Locked, not free

Flexed downward

Right shoulder and arm (for violin, viola)

Elbow above shoulder height

Raising right shoulder

Left shoulder and arm (for violin, viola)

Raising left shoulder to secure instrument

Hugging left arm into body

Bringing left elbow across body, while forearm/hand rotate outward

Shoulder blade tilted down and forward

Spine positions

Excessive spine movement

Tilting too much at waist, especially to left

Spine collapses, or arches backwards too often, too far

Instrument position

For example, violin or viola points downward towards ground too far, too often

Risk factors for tension:

Holding breath: Are you breathing well, and easily? Never hold your breath.

Excessive facial expressions

Tight mouth and jaw

Excessive use of muscles, more than what is necessary for the job

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