

PLAYING HEALTHY
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The most common causes of injury are:

- bad posture;
- a flexed or extended wrist: try to keep it aligned (straight);
- excessive contraction in fingers (tension caused by clenching or pressing down too hard);
- emotional effort ("to be good" "to get it" "to play fast") rather than pure listening and creating with respect for present ability with gradual expansion into speed and complexity
- excessive hours of practice without warm-up/cool-down;

How you "feed" your muscles will determine their health and stamina. Healthy Muscles are created by giving them:

- oxygen: breathe deeply;
- heightened circulation: aerobic exercise;
- muscle balance: exercises that use the muscles counter to how they are used when you make music;
- Balanced Diet: 8 glasses of water a day; 50% vegetables and fruits; Vitamins: Vitamin C, calcium/magnesium, and B complex, while avoiding foods that rob your muscles of nutrition such as: sugar, coffee, processed flour, and soda;

The healing process must include:

- technique rehabilitation (remove the cause of the injury by adjusting how you hold and play your instrument);
- rest: practice in small increments; if chronic pain persists, take a few days off;
- body-work: massage, acupuncture, hot/cold compresses, castor oil packs, magnets, etc.;
- muscle balance: strengthen the opposing and surrounding musculature to give greater support to the injured area;
- warm-up/cool-down: never play without stimulating circulation to warm up your muscles; always take the time to shake out and stretch afterwards to lessen the degree of possible problems caused during practice.

Music-Stand Position

Look straight ahead. Leave your head in that position and lower your eyes half-way: the music-stand should be placed so that the music is right there, waiting for you.

General Posture

Always try to bring the instrument to you instead of turning your body into a pretzel to go to the instrument!

Standing Posture

Tilt your head back; tilt it down; turn it to the right; turn it to the left. Now come back to center and do your best to keep your head and neck centered when you play

Lift your shoulders up high and squeeze them up until they feel tired; then relax them down and leave them there!

Stand on or put pressure on your left foot, repeat this with your right, place equal pressure on both your feet, and stay there. It's fine to move your feet to new positions as you play — just make sure that your weight is placed equally over both feet.

Seated Posture

Cross one leg over the other. Now switch to the opposite side. Notice that it's harder to sit up straight with your legs crossed. Now put both feet around to the back of the chair on the right side; do this to the left side. Try to sit up straight in either of those positions! Now bring your feet center with plenty of space between your knees, and put both your feet on the floor. You have just found the position that gives support to a nice straight back.

Stick your chest and stomach way way forward so that you look like a big puff ball, and count to ten. Pull your chest and stomach way way back so that you are curved over like an empty bowl, and count to ten. Now sit tall and try to balance there without tension while you play.

Wrist Position

Hold your arms in front of you as if you are about to place your palms on an imaginary wall in front of you and flex your hands up towards you; now extend your wrists by lowering your palms towards the floor; return to neutral (straight wrist) and relax your arms into playing position; try to maintain this alignment in your wrists when making music.

Constructive Rest

When we practice we need to take little breaks to relax our muscles, check our posture, and get ready to start in again with greater relaxation. Every five or ten minutes, stop, take a deep deep breath, shake your fingers, your hands, your arms, and then your whole body. Take another deep deep breath and check your posture before you continue your practice session.