

Teaching Musicians' Wellness in Your Private Studio

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www.musicianswellnessmovement.com

Abstract

Musicians are prone to chronic pain and injury due to the physical demands of playing an instrument. Lack of education in musicians' wellness encourages a culture of ignoring injury symptoms and playing through pain. Body awareness, fitness, and healthy practice can help promote sustainable playing in musicians. Musicians' wellness education should be integrated into private music lessons and emphasized for musicians of all ages and levels.

Cause for Alarm

- At least 76% of professional orchestral musicians will experience at least one serious injury during their career that requires time off from performing¹
- Up to 93% of collegiate music majors ages 18-24 will experience playing-related injuries during their time at the conservatory or music school²
- Up to 67% of youth musicians ages 7-17 will experience playing-related musculoskeletal problems³

Risk Factors for Injuries in Musicians⁴

Physical Factors	Practice Factors
Physical tension in the body	Extended hours of practice
Awkward body positions	Rapid increase in practice time
Repetitive movements	Lack of breaks during practice
Overall physical fitness	Playing without adequate warm-up
Stress and anxiety	Technical difficulty of repertoire

¹ Fishbein, M., Middlestadt, S., Ottati, V., Straus, S., & Ellis, A. *Med. Problems Perf. Artists*. Vol. 3. Issue 1. 1988.

² Stone, R., Blackie, H., & Tiernan, A. *Med. Problems Perf. Artists*. Vol. 14. Issue 3. p. 141-149. 1999.

³ Ranelli, S., Smith, A. & Straker, L. *Int. J. Music Educ.* Vol. 33. Issue 4. p. 390-412. 2015.

⁴ Guptill, C. & Zaza, C. *Music Ed. Journal*. Vol. 96. Issue 4. p. 28-34. 2010.

Body Awareness

→ Use it in Your Studio:

1. Ensure students have appropriate sized instruments
 - Consider each student's age and body stature and adapt instruments if necessary
2. Educate yourself and your students on basic anatomy and physiology
 - Get creative with resources: use educational children's anatomy books, coloring books, or create your own art project and tie the content back to musicianship
3. Teach proper posture and playing position from day one and reinforce consistently
 - Prioritize neutral, tension-free body positions: consider spinal alignment, relaxed shoulders, neutral wrist position, natural curved fingers, minimal finger pressure

Fitness

→ Use it in Your Studio:

1. Promote the mindset that musicians are instrumental athletes
 - Educate students about the similarities between musicians and athletes and about how physical fitness directly benefits their playing
2. Emphasize strength and flexibility to maintain healthy posture and reduce injury risk
 - Find a yoga studio that offers classes for all age groups or recommend specific posture-strengthening exercises and stretches to your students
3. Encourage cardiovascular activities to improve breath support and increase overall fitness
 - Advocate for appropriate physical activity by recommending community sports and fitness classes and creating weekly fitness goals

Healthy Practice

→ Use it in Your Studio:

1. Teach deliberate practice skills
 - When developing a practice strategy, consider how deliberate practice applies to all areas of musicianship: technical, musical, physical, and postural
2. Establish a routine of physical, mental, and instrument warm-ups
 - Use engaging, age-appropriate exercises (kids love GoNoodle.com for physical pre-lesson warm-ups!)
3. Teach students how to recognize warning signs
 - If students feel pain while playing, help them adjust their posture, recommend strength and flexibility exercises, and modify practice time and intensity

Prioritize Musicians' Wellness in Your Studio

The Medical Problems of Performing Artists journal reports that less than 50% of music teachers have ever received education in injury prevention strategies.⁵ Unfortunately, the lack of training in musicians' wellness has perpetuated pain and injury in musicians of all ages. Teachers must obtain training in wellness education and pass the knowledge onto their students.

As a music teacher, your wellness responsibilities include...

- ✓ Leading by example: start your own healthy musicianship journey
- ✓ Teaching that healthy musicianship is a fundamental aspect of playing an instrument
- ✓ Prioritizing musicians' wellness by incorporating it into every lesson
- ✓ Proactively identifying and addressing risk factors and warning signs in your students
- ✓ Being a wellness resource and referring students to health professionals when necessary

The Musicians' Wellness Movement

In 2016, Melissa Vining founded the *Musicians' Wellness Movement* to educate music teachers, students, and professional musicians about practical approaches to injury prevention, sustainable playing, and overall wellness. The *Musicians' Wellness Movement* empowers musicians with knowledge about body awareness, fitness, and healthy practice to foster a cultural shift toward wellness in our profession. Please visit the *Musicians' Wellness Movement* website to learn more about the three areas of healthy musicianship!

➔ Check us out online: www.musicianswellnessmovement.com

Healthy Musicianship Curriculum from the Musicians' Wellness Movement

We are excited to announce our upcoming healthy musicianship curriculum guide, specifically designed to educate independent music teachers about musicians' wellness and to provide practical suggestions and lesson plans for incorporating healthy musicianship into their teaching. Join our email list, and you'll be the first to know when we roll out the healthy musicianship curriculum!

➔ Join our email list from our website: www.musicianswellnessmovement.com/contact.html

⁵ Horvath, J. *Playing Less Hurt*. p. 87. 2010. Hal Leonard Books.

Resources for Further Study

- ✓ Athletes and the Arts (athletesandthearts.com)
- ✓ Health Promotion in Schools of Music (hpsm.unt.edu)
- ✓ Medical Problems of Performing Artists Journal (sciandmed.com)
- ✓ Performing Arts Medicine Association (artsmed.org)
- ✓ Playing Less Hurt: An Injury Prevention Guide for Musicians (Janet Horvath)
- ✓ Teaching Healthy Musicianship: The Music Educator's Guide to Injury Prevention and Wellness (Nancy Taylor)
- ✓ The Athletic Musician: A Guide to Playing Without Pain (Barbara Paull & Christine Harrison)
- ✓ The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness (Gerald Klickstein)
- ✓ Yoga for the Arts (yogaforthearts.com)

Contact Information

Please contact me with questions, suggestions, or just to talk about healthy musicianship!
I would love to hear from you.

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