

FIT TO PLAY

Top tips for instrumental musicians

Whatever your instrument, and whatever style of music you play, you should take a holistic approach to your practising and performing. Here are a few tried-and-tested tips to remind you to think about YOU as well as your art!

1. Never try to play through pain – stop beforehand.
2. Always do a series of physical warm-up exercises away from your instrument, to prepare for each episode of playing. See the factsheet on warm-ups for musicians.
3. Allow a few minutes to adjust physically after playing. Do cool-down exercises to let your body unwind.
4. Ensure that your technique is as sound as possible, allowing for individual physical proportions and level of experience. You should seek regular professional advice, whatever your level of playing; bad technique may become a habit and lead to further problems.
5. Ensure that you are as comfortable as possible when playing your instrument. Check your own posture when playing (a full-length mirror may be helpful – or even better, videoing yourself on a camcorder). Adaptations (e.g. chin rests, shoulder pads, supports, straps) are designed to help you, so make sure that you take full advantage of what is available. Expert advice from a teacher may help.
6. Always check the position and height of your music stand, chair, piano stool, organ mirror, etc, to ensure that playing is as comfortable as possible and that you maintain good posture whilst playing. Changes made by others may not suit you, and adjustments may be necessary.
7. Plan your practice sessions to allow frequent breaks in playing. It is important to stop before any discomfort is reached – kitchen timers, mobile phones or digital watches can be pre-set to remind you that a break from playing is advisable. Relax your muscles for a few minutes.
8. Your physical build may make some repertoire more uncomfortable for you. Respect and accept this, and design your repertoire and rehearsal schedules accordingly. Try to play within your capabilities.

9. Your general lifestyle can effect your playing. Make sure you are eating and sleeping properly. Vision and hearing can affect your neck and upper limb posture; have them tested periodically.
10. A mixture of regular exercise (e.g. a sport of your choice, such as swimming), and relaxation will help you maximise your potential and reduce the risk of playing-related injury. Performing is stressful and tension can lead to pain and stiffness. There are many forms of exercise and relaxation techniques. Find ones that you enjoy – they're more likely to help!
11. Remember that you are a musical athlete, and that your performance depends on taking care of yourself. Think twice before going roller-blading, painting the ceiling or banging nails into walls in the days before a concert.
12. Get a life! There is a world outside music. Find a hobby or interest totally unrelated to your music making, and spend time on that as well.

Getting help from BAPAM

If you are in pain or have performance-related health concerns, contact BAPAM to arrange a free assessment at one of our clinics. Remember that the sooner you address any problems, the less damage you will do in the long term.

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