

## Musicians are Athletes Too

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Performing artists are prone to repetitive stress injuries. Playing a musical instrument professionally or dancing requires a level of physical fitness similar to that of a sports athlete. Each requires agility, flexibility, neuromuscular coordination, muscular endurance and muscular strength. There is one major difference between musicians and sports athletes. Sports athletes have coaches observing and correcting the athlete's movement patterns in order to improve efficiency as well as hoping to prevent a sports injury during each practice and athletic event, while the musician sees their "coach" once a week for an hour. He/she is expected to remember any technique changes etc (mechanical corrections etc. ...) while they practice alone. All these individuals follow the adage "practice makes perfect" or "practice makes permanent". The musician who doesn't follow or forgets their "coaches" suggestions may find unnecessary stresses put on their bodies leading to a music-related injury [1].

My research has predicted that repetitive muscular injuries in the performing artist are closely related to three factors: abnormal postures, sustained postures and excessive emotional stresses. The musician plays instruments that are not ergonomically designed, requiring arms, hands, and fingers, to be held in awkward inefficient postures for extended periods. These positions often cause repetitive stress injuries. Peer pressure, teacher pressure and perfectionism also often create increased sympathetic nervous system activation leading to abnormal muscular tension resulting in pain and dysfunction. This leads to over practice, as well [2].

Joint hypermobility is very common in musicians. Many musicians have positive signs and symptoms of benign hypermobility joint syndrome. This syndrome, besides presenting with sore and aching joints, often causes a variety of other symptoms such as gastric issues,

headaches, increased sympathetic nervous system activity, fatigue, and poor anesthesia tolerance. It is often my experience that musicians report numerous ailments and complaints, which do not seem to relate to each other or even to their repetitive activity – only to find that they test positive for benign joint hypermobility. Unfortunately, there is no cure for this syndrome, but the knowledge and education about the syndrome seems to positively affect the musician and allows them to have more effective performances while living with the pain [3].

Sports medicine principles may be used when evaluating and treating a performing artist. The health care provider should be knowledgeable about the various instruments as well as dance techniques. Educating the artist is key in preventing repetitive stress injuries. It is important to educate the performing artist "coaches" as well, in that many of them have poor understanding of the mechanical stresses involved in their art. Yoga and deep breathing exercises are also extremely helpful in maintaining good health. I think they need to itemize the reason (s) why here for why yoga and deep breathing ... seems to be unrelated to anything discussed above.

Please refer to this web site for further information: [www.healthymusicianworkshop.com](http://www.healthymusicianworkshop.com).

### References

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