**Musician Wellness**

**Common Injuries & How to Prevent Them**

* Repetitive Stress Injury (performing the same motion over and over again)
  + Tendinitis / “Tennis Elbow” (swelling of the tendon)
  + Nerve Entrapment
    - Carpal Tunnel (swelling of tendon in wrist, pinching the nerves and causing pain/loss of feeling in hand)
      * Take breaks, don’t collapse wrists, stretches, balance practice and other activities involving hand movement (ex: tying, writing).
    - Neck (all nerves are connected to the spine/neck. Over time, the bones in your neck press down on each other, pinching nerves throughout your body.)
      * Get a friend to gently expand the neck by lifting your head. (to lift, stand behind the person who is sitting, 2 fingers at the corner of the jaw and thumb at the nape. Gently pull up.)
* Postural Syndrome (holding a specific body position for a long period of time)
  + 1st Rib
    - Located right above the collar bone socket on the shoulder, feels tender when pressed.
    - Over time, the first rib gets raised, so pressing it down will release tension.
    - Get a friend to press on it while tilting your head in the opposite direction and hold for 30 seconds. Neck movement should be improved.
  + “Knots”
    - Most common in the shoulders, caused by muscles flexing but never releasing.
    - To alleviate knots, rub the area the area to warm up the muscles, then get a friend to apply pressure with their thumb to the knot for 30 seconds (similar to the first rib exercise).
* Training Error
  + Increasing practicing frequency/duration too rapidly.
  + You should only increase the amount of practice time by a maximum of 10% each week to avoid injury.
  + Plan out your schedule so you practice a little bit each day instead of practicing for a large amount of time.

**Other Injury Prevention Tips**

* Awareness of Everyday Life
  + Sleeping (neck, wrists, etc.), don’t sleep on your stomach, keep head level.
  + Don’t look down at your phone, reading, doing homework, etc. to avoid neck problems.
  + Make sure shoulders are relaxed (ex: shivering when it’s cold)
* Maintaining Proper and Upright Posture
  + Balanced pelvis
    - Hold your hips with your thumbs in front. Without moving your upper body, rotate your pelvis forward, then rotate your pelvis backwards, then find the middle. Do this before standing and sitting.
    - Don’t hold tension in shoulders or arms.
    - Raise stand so you are looking straight ahead.
    - Feet flat on the floor, don’t lock knees, don’t hold tension in your legs.
* Frequent Breaks
  + For every 25 min of practice, take a 5 min break.
  + During breaks, don’t do anything that involves the use of fingers/hands, stretch, or lay on your back.
* Warming up
  + Do stretches before AND after practicing
  + Don’t start with the hardest part of your music. Start with slow scales, gentle finger exercises, etc.
* When Injuries Occur the Most
  + The week before a performance, musicians are typically anxious, stressed, and prone to over practicing.
    - Meditate a little before practicing to get in a clearer mindset, and avoid over practicing.
    - Also make sure you are eating, sleeping, and exercising normally throughout the week.
  + Stop practicing if you are tired or losing focus.
    - It is very easy to make stupid mistakes, lazy posture, and frustration leading to tense muscles.

**Seeking Out Help**

* When
  + As soon as you feel ANY discomfort or pain, seek out help. DO NOT push through the discomfort or pain.
* Who
  + Notify your teacher of any tension, discomfort, or pain to figure out how to play the passage with more ease.
  + For neck, spine, or carpal tunnel, see a chiropractor
  + For muscles, tendinitis, joints, or any other injuries, see a physical therapist
  + Alexander Technique teachers help improve self-awareness and playing technique.

**Stretches**

* Neck
  + 1st rib exercise
  + Gently looking from side to side, or tilting head back
* Shoulders
  + Place right hand on a wall and stretch by turning body to the left, away from the wall. Repeat with other side.
  + Slowly bend down, arching your back outward as much as you can. Slowly come back up to a normal standing position, still arching your back. Then place hands on a wall, keep elbows straight, and cave your shoulders inward.
  + Go to a corner and place each hand on the walls. Keep elbows straight and cave your shoulders inward.
* Wrists
  + Extend arm out in front of you. With your other hand, place it on the base of all of your fingers and gently pull fingers backward. Repeat with other wrist.
  + You can also do this with a wall instead of using your other hand.
* Fingers
  + Warm up joints by gently moving your fingers, bending at both sets of knuckles.
* Lower back
  + Musicians often overuse their upper back, so warming up the lower back before practice actives those muscles, putting less strain on the upper back/shoulders.
  + Sit on a chair where the back of the chair stops at the middle of your back. With your arms open and palms facing up, bend backwards.
* Legs
  + Make sure to also do basic leg stretches because your legs also support your posture while standing and sitting.

**The amount of dedication musicians have to make music is astounding. Take care of yourself so you can happily follow that passion for the rest of your life.**