

Common Musicians Complaints Explained

Playing music is a passion for many people. To become an accomplished musician takes hours of practice and the hunger to reach your next goal mastering the instrument. One source says it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become a virtuoso. Musicians, especially elite level players are athletes. The rush of performing that music live and nailing it is amazing. It is what drives most musicians.

Many musicians unfortunately suffer silently with pain which occurs from the repetitiveness of playing. The hours we spend playing our instruments can take its toll on our bodies. Many musicians have found that their performances suffer when their body is not functioning well and some have given up their instruments for good because it hurts too much to play.

Understanding your body and why it hurts can help you solve many of these problems. It will also allow you to play better which is important to every serious musician. A series of connecting joints including the ankle, knee and hip work from the ground up to form our foundation, similar to the foundation of a house. This indirectly affects the way our shoulder, elbow and wrist works. We call this series of joints kinetic (motion) chains. Many musicians get frustrated because of acquired painful problems, often so-called overuse syndromes due to a breakdown of the kinetic chains in the upper and lower body. Your body style (we all have different inherited body mechanics) can result in upper and lower body problems (problems with the way you play your instrument) and result in foot, leg, arm, elbow, shoulder, neck lower and upper back soreness and pain.

The way we are built or our body style (an inherited trait) determines how efficiently our body works and can determine how well you play on a given day as

well. Mechanical problems in our bodies always begin from the ground up. What occurs at the foot will affect the way the rest of the body works through a series of connecting joints called kinetic chains. Symmetry is mandatory for optimal function, similar to the foundation of a house. If our foundation (feet) and the way we stand is asymmetrical, we are likely to develop problems in the lower back, neck, shoulder arm and hand. Many musicians get frustrated because of acquired painful problems, often called overuse syndromes affect the way they can play and perform.



As in all sports (playing an instrument is a sport of sorts) your pelvis is responsible for most of the power your body can develop. If it works improperly, your mid section will tighten and distort, pulling your shoulders forward and your arms will tighten making playing your instrument more difficult. Your legs will be also affected which will further distort your pelvis causing lower back pain. If you play

drums, this can create problems when you use the kick drum and your arms will tire faster than they should. If you are a guitar or other stringed instrument player, you will likely experience arm cramping, numbness, neck and shoulder and even lower back pain. As the muscles tighten, they will result in distortion of the spinal segments as well which can have long term negative effects on the nerves in the spine and your overall health.

Many musicians falsely believe these problems will go away on their own. Some eventually stop playing when they can no longer tolerate the discomfort which destroys the joy of playing. Since these problems are mechanical, and

largely an expression of the way you are built, the underlying problems will not go away by themselves and should be addressed by a health care professional who understands musicians.

The body does not tolerate asymmetry well especially when it comes to musicians (How you stand affects how your lower back and upper body works). It is vitally important that people who are built asymmetrically wear shoe inserts called foot orthotics that help improve symmetry. If you look at your shoes and see the two sides having significantly different wear patterns, this is a strong indicator of body asymmetry. If you are not sure, you should consider seeing a health care provider who understands body mechanics and what is required of you when you play your instrument.

COMMON MUSICIANS COMPLAINTS

Shoulder Pain – There are four muscles that consist of the shoulder joint, sometimes referred to as the rotator cuff. If the joint is pulled forward on the chest wall because of tightness in the core muscles, or for other reasons, the shoulder will work inefficiently, affecting the neck and forearm. The shoulder may also become painful with use and since both guitar players and percussionists rely on power from their shoulder and core, it is important to have this checked out by a professional who understands musicians.

Arm, Elbow and Finger pain and numbness – When the pelvis is unbalanced, your shoulder will lean forward causing it to function poorly and tighten, placing stress in the muscles in the upper forearm and elbow. This places stress on the forearm which will cause those muscles to tighten. As they tighten, nerves can become entrapped at the elbow, forearm and wrist causing numbness. This reduction of motion strains the bones in the wrist and thumb which over time will tighten and can become painful.

The result is pain, numbness and a loss of accuracy in your playing.

Neck Pain – When the shoulder muscles work poorly, they cause the muscles surrounding the shoulders and neck to tighten. These muscles will eventually restrict the way the neck can move causing pain and stiffness.

Tendonosis – When muscles get tight, the muscle tendons will be repeatedly traumatized with usage. This called Tendonosis which is quite painful with activity. The loss of flexibility of the muscle will place force repeatedly into the tendon resulting in pain, ganglion cysts, trigger fingers and painful adhesions along the path of the tendon. Musicians feel it in their elbows, shoulders and fingers. Rarely is the area of pain the true cause of the problem and the provider you choose should look at your posture, body style, lower back as well as the arms and elbows to determine why the problem exists.

Lower Back Pain – Back pain is the classic symptom of body asymmetry. Usually, the person may have low arches or flat feet and one flares out more than the other. Pain becomes noticeable after standing for a while either during practice or on stage. Drummers often notice it a while after they have played because using the arms and legs warms up the back muscles. When they cool down, the pain becomes noticeable.

DOS AND DON'TS

What not to do –

1. Do not ignore pain, other than soreness from practicing. Pain means something is wrong.

What to do –

1. Stretch forearms periodically during practice to loosen muscles and prevent cramping.
2. Seek out the help of a qualified health care provider who understands musicians.
3. Ice areas that are very sore. If you continue to see the problem worsen, see an appropriate health care provider.

4. Be sure to wear either custom or off the shelf foot orthotics if you are built asymmetrically and your shoes wear unevenly.
5. Musicians should perform exercises at the beginning or a practice session or before a gig. String instrument and keyboard players play scales which warms up the muscles and prepares you for playing. Drummers can perform jumping jacks which will preload the shoulders and legs and hips.

For further information, visit our website at www.backfixer1.com. Check out Brochures On line.

Biography of author

Dr. William Charschan has worked with a number of professional and casual musicians and has been playing guitar since the age of 12 years old. He is a member of a working rock band known as Midlife Crisis and plays lead guitar. He was trained in Myofascial Release and Active Release Techniques® in 1994. He also uses Graston Technique, a tool based method that very efficiently improves muscular and tendon function. Dr. Charschan practices in both Scotch Plains and North Brunswick NJ and has helped many musicians recover from painful conditions that affected their playing.

For further information, call



**Charschan Chiropractic
AND SPORTS INJURY ASSOCIATES**

**Charschan Chiropractic and
Sports Injury Associates**

490 Georges Rd. No. Brunswick

(732) 846 - 6400

1281 Raritan Rd. Scotch Plains

(732) 829 - 0009

<http://www.backfixer1.com>

*Designed by William D. Charschan D.C., C.C.S.P. Copyright
2/20/2009. All rights reserved.*

Common Musicians Complaints



Explained