DO'S AND DON'TS

10 DO'S FOR INJURY PREVENTION

1. DO WARM-UP. Warmed muscles are more efficient, strong and resilient. Muscles that are overused, fatigued and under-conditioned are more tense and require more work for a demanding task. Start with a walk, then several stretches away from the instrument and do them slowly and smoothly. At the instrument, start slowly and easily.

2. DO TAKE BREAKS. Ten minutes per hour minimum is a good guide. It is helpful to let your arms down and hang them loosely at your sides for a few seconds after a difficult passage. After *tremolo* or *fortissimo* passages or after long stretches of sustained playing, move your thumbs in circles or stretch them out gently to release any tension. Reed makers, this applies to you, too.

3. DO SIT WITH GOOD POSTURE. KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS DOWN AND YOUR BACK STRAIGHT. Keep your weight forward and on your feet. Do not slouch. Don’t cross your legs when you play, or curl your feet around the chair. Keep your head upright, in a neutral position. Lifting shoulders, turning or twisting your torso, and leaning to the left or right contribute to muscle strain and may lead to injury.

4. DO INCREASE YOUR PRACTICE LOAD GRADUALLY AND VARY YOUR REPERTOIRE.

5. DO SOME STRESS-REDUCING RELAXATION ACTIVITY AND GET EXERCISE. Yoga, stretching, swimming, Alexander Technique and massage are all good preventative activities. These can help to keep tension from building up. Muscles that are tight, weak and untoned are more injury-prone than strong, flexible and resilient muscles.

6. DO TAKE ONE DAY OFF A WEEK.

7. DO BE EASIER ON YOURSELF WHEN YOU ARE UNDER DURESS OR WHEN YOU ARE OVERTIRED. Your body will be more tense and at risk for injury when you are under duress. These are times to be careful about intense, long hours of playing. When you’re stressed or overtired, take more breaks, take more time to warm-up, do stretches more often, and practice more mindfully.

8. DO MOVE. Sitting very still builds up tension. During long hours of playing, take time to wiggle and stretch. Try to avoid being static or “freezing” in any one position.

9. DO BREATHE DEEPLY. When we’re nervous we tend to breathe very shallow breaths, or even hold our breath. Our muscles then may not get the oxygen they need. In fact, we may shake. During rests in music, concentrate on taking several deep breaths.

10. DO PRACTICE AWAY FROM THE INSTRUMENT. This is especially helpful for memorization and performance anxiety. Listen to music and study the scores or piano parts of your repertoire. It’s just as important to practice mental preparation as it is to achieve physical mastery of your music. Visualize performing well. Silence that doubting, chattering voice inside you by giving yourself positive suggestions. Tell yourself: “I am calm,” and “I sound wonderful,” rather than “What if I miss this shift?” or “I’m sure to have a memory slip.” Your subconscious believes whatever you tell it.
10 DON'TS FOR INJURY PREVENTION

1. DON'T IGNORE PAIN. Pain is an indicator. Your body is trying to tell you something. Stop playing, ice the area, take some time off and try to analyze what may have caused the problem. Listen to your body.

2. DON'T BE MACHO. Don't try to practice for hours and hours. Consistency is more important than duration. Don't practice everything fortissimo and up to tempo. Pace yourself by practicing at slower tempi and lesser dynamics.

3. DON'T PRACTICE MINDLESSLY. Use a tape recorder to practice with a critical ear. Isolate problems in your repertoire and analyze rather than going over and over a passage. Have a realistic plan that you'd like to accomplish before you start practicing. Don't play through pieces all the time. Alternate your repertoire. Don't try to get through everything every day.

4. DON'T IGNORE CHEWED UP FINGERS OR LIP PAIN. Either your bridge is too high or you're pressing your fingers too hard, or both. It doesn't take hammering to press strings or keys down. Don't hold your fingers down. Release all non-playing fingers. Don't overwork your lips.

5. DON'T JUMP INTO PLAYING A FULL SCHEDULE AFTER A VACATION, ILLNESS OR INJURY. Take time to get back into shape. It's better to play short periods more often throughout the day, rather than long chunks. Start with ten to fifteen minutes at a time. Increase the number of ten-minute practice periods per day before increasing the length of time.

6. DON'T SAY "YES" TO EVERYTHING. Especially at summer music festivals or in a particularly stimulating environment, it's easy to get in over your head. Be realistic about how many chamber groups you can be in or how many performances you can do. Don't schedule so tightly that you arrive breathless for a rehearsal with no time to warm-up.

7. DON'T CRAM, OR SHOW UP UNPREPARED FOR A REHEARSAL. Sightreading does not allow you to anticipate motions. Sudden quick motions can lead to injury. Try to look ahead in the music and focus on relaxed, flowing motions. Try to allow yourself enough time to prepare your auditions or recitals. When this is impossible, try to program wisely. Don't program several works that are new to you.

8. DON'T PLAY ON AN INSTRUMENT THAT IS OUT OF ADJUSTMENT. Make sure your instrument is properly repaired so it responds easily. Lower your strings. Wind players, get regular instrument check-ups to avoid leaks and bent keys. Oboists and bassoonists, killing yourself on hard reeds does not a hero make.

9. DON'T IGNORE CONDITIONS AROUND YOU. Don't play if you have no room and you are cramped. Don't position your stand in such a way that you have to crane your neck to see it and the conductor. Avoid playing in cold places or where there is a draft. Try to adjust to the conditions around you so that you can be as comfortable as possible. Don't wear tight clothing, as this will tend to cramp you physically. Don't forget to wear hearing protection.

10. DON'T PANIC IF SOMETHING HURTS. Some aches and pains are inevitable. Take a day off and don't worry about it. Usually a short rest takes care of most minor aches. Learn your limitations and the danger signals. If you are worried, seek help.