

PERFECT HARMONY: HEALTHY HABITS FOR MUSIC TEACHERS

Introduction

Music teachers' schedules are often filled with teaching, lesson planning, performing, rehearsing, and more. While such schedules make for dynamic careers, they also increase one's chances of developing various health problems. In a study of 496 British music teachers, 70% experienced physical problems that hindered their teaching and performing, more than 50% experienced performance anxiety and over 30% reported hearing difficulties (Norton, 2019). These findings suggest that occupational demands may put teachers at heightened risk for physical and psychological strain. The purpose of this literature review is to equip studio and classroom music teachers with practical strategies to preserve their physical, psychological, and auditory health.

Healthy Physical Habits

- Leave ample space in your studio to walk and stretch. Try to pace or stretch once per hour.
 - Stretches: <https://www.healthline.com/health/deskercise>
- Open blinds to let natural light in and use overhead lights as needed to prevent eye fatigue.
- If teaching online or staring at a computer for long amounts of time, use the 20-20-20 rule: look 20 feet away, for 20 seconds, every 20 minutes.
- Invest in ergonomic office chairs to support posture and proper alignment.
- Drink a glass of water between students/classes to stay hydrated and prevent vocal strain.

Healthy Psychological Habits

- Practice mindfulness (a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment) during and outside of teaching.
- Keep a journal or gratitude journal.
- Engage in active rest (e.g., a hobby) and inactive (e.g., sleeping) rest.
- Take on tasks that align with your values.

Healthy Auditory Habits

- Be aware of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) recommended exposure limit: 85 decibels averaged over eight hours.
- Reduce exposure time by half for every three decibel increase above 85. (e.g., exposure time for 88 dBs is four hours).
- Visit an audiologist regularly for hearing tests.
- Invest in high quality ear plugs.
- Monitor sound levels with decibel monitoring apps like NIOSH Sound Level Meter, Decibel X, and Sound Decibel Meter.
- Rest ears after prolonged exposure to loud sounds.
- Listen to low volume, white noise sounds if experiencing tinnitus.

Implications for Future Studies

- Conduct empirical studies that measure which strategies are most effective for preventing or reversing burnout.
- Investigate the effects of mentorship on helping young teachers remain in the profession.
- Establish community groups among local independent studio teachers and public school teachers.

Additional Resources

- Athletes and the Arts: <https://athletesandthearts.com>
- The Bulletproof Musician Blog: <https://bulletproofmusician.com>
- Dangerous Decibels: <http://dangerousdecibels.org>
- Performing Arts Medicine Association: <https://artsmed.org>