



## HEALTH TIPS FOR PERFORMING ARTISTS SHEET 3: WHAT TO DO WHEN IT HURTS – PART 2

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### OVERUSE AND CHRONIC INJURIES:

A **CHRONIC** injury is one that has been present over an extended time period (for longer than about a month). These injuries are more complicated to manage, as by that stage the injury may have had an impact on technique, confidence, participation in physical activity, and so on.

These injuries may be acute injuries that have become chronic because of

- Inadequate rest.
- Inadequate rehabilitation

Often chronic injuries are caused by **OVERUSE**. These injuries are characterized by repetitive strain of tissue that produces cumulative smaller scale damage to one or more structures. They occur when the soft tissue (muscle, ligament tendon or nerve) is stressed beyond its limit. The result is strain (muscle/tendon) or sprain (ligament). Unfortunately, tissues that have overuse injury are more easily fatigued, and move less efficiently which further increases the risk of aggravating the injury with continued playing.

### Management:

These conditions often require a multifaceted approach and it may be helpful to get an appropriately trained health professional to give you some guidance (See ASPAH Health Tips Sheet 4). Your management may include :-

- Rest – relative or complete rest will be required to resolve most chronic injuries
- Risk factor analysis – the role of risk factors in the development and maintenance of overuse and other chronic injuries is fundamental. Some risk factors that can be modified to reduce tissue strain are physical condition, posture and practice habits to name a few
- Technique analysis – talk to your teacher to see if your technique is contributing to tension
- Posture analysis – use a video or mirror to examine your playing posture



- Treatment – for example, manual therapy, acupuncture, electrotherapy
- Exercise – stretching, strengthening, proprioception,
- Body awareness – Feldenkrais, Alexander, yoga etc
- Medication – anti-inflammatories, analgesics,

## Overuse Injury Examples:

While these common examples of overuse injuries can present as acute injuries, they evolve from overuse and often can become chronic.

- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Tenosynovitis – De Quervains and others
- Tennis Elbow
- Golfers Elbow
- Rotator Cuff Tendinopathy
- Shoulder Bursitis

Pain which persists beyond the acute phase to become chronic can begin to get a life of its own. That is, because of its longevity our brains begins to change to accommodate it. It is almost as if the brain has “learnt” the pain. With chronic pain therefore a number of phenomena occur that are not seen in acute pain. For instance, emotional state will directly affect the severity of pain. For example stress can amplify the pain levels we experience. Even more strangely, even once the source of the pain is removed or reduced, the brain can go on perceiving pain for some time.

Also, the existence of chronic pain can also produce marked changes in how we move the rest of our body. Many people with chronic pain become scared to move (“kinesiophobia”) which can ultimately prolong or prevent recovery by adversely affecting movement patterns and technique. Suffice to say that long-term pain conditions can be challenging!



## EARLY WARNING SIGNS – “A stitch in time”:

Even better than good injury management is **PREVENTION**. If you have any of the following while performing you could be risking an overuse injury

- Muscle fatigue
- Tingling
- Weakness
- Reduced co-ordination/clumsiness
- Stiffness and difficulty with normal daily activities

Chances are that some timely rest or a change in practice routine are in order to prevent the development of an overuse injury.

NB: If you aren't sure or your symptoms are severe ask your GP for advice/referral

## Where to find more information:

Horvath, Janet (2010). *Playing (less) Hurt: An Injury prevention guide for musicians*.

Rosset-I-Llobet, J (2009) *The Musicians Body*.

## References

Brukner, P. and Khan, K. (2010). *Clinical Sports Medicine* (revised third edition)