



HEALTH TIPS FOR PERFORMING ARTISTS SHEET 5: FIT AS A FIDDLE – FIT TO PLAY

Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it. ~Plato

What is Fitness?

Fitness is broadly defined as an individual's capacity to meet to the demands of their environment. To put it another way, physical fitness can be thought of as the ability to comfortably meet the physical challenges of performance, or any of life's other activities. Fitness can be thought of as either **general** or **specific**. While general fitness implies a state of health and well being, specific fitness means the ability to meet the specific demands of a particular task such as performance.

We can divide physical fitness into components. For instance, **Cardiorespiratory** (aerobic) fitness relates to the fitness of the heart and lungs while **muscular** fitness relates to the power, flexibility and endurance of the muscles. Our balance, agility and coordination are part of **motor** fitness.

Performers should use exercise to improve their specific and general fitness that helps the body to become more resilient and efficient at handling the physical stresses of practice, rehearsal and performance.

What does exercise do?

At a microscopic level every tissue in the body responds to regular exercise. Training for as little as 6 weeks can produce measurable changes in the following body parts:

Muscles – increases in strength, endurance, flexibility and efficiency.

Bones – increases in strength and density

Ligaments and tendons – increases in strength and flexibility

Heart and Lungs – increases in efficiency, oxygen delivery and endurance

Nerve tissue – increases in efficiency

For the performer these changes add up! Improved energy levels, faster recovery after exertion, increased strength, correction of muscle imbalances, greater endurance and more flexibility are just a few things that are likely to help you meet your performance goals and decrease your risk of injury. Balance, body awareness and posture, so vitally important for healthy performance are also enhanced by regular training.



We also know that regular exercise has a preventative effect and helps to reduce the risk of a myriad of diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, colon cancer.

Many other conditions are also effectively treated with exercise and it often prescribed as part of management for depression/anxiety, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, weight problems, chronic pain, arthritis and musculoskeletal injury.

How much is enough?

Based on current research findings, the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on physical activity recommend to achieve the effects mentioned above adults aged 18 to 64 years should do at least 150 minutes/week of moderate (see below for details) intensity aerobic physical activity or 75 minutes/week of vigorous (see below for details) physical exercise or a combination of the two. This activity should be in bouts of at least 10 minutes in duration.

WHO further recommends that additional health benefits can be achieved by increasing this training to 300 minutes/week of moderate intensity exercise or 150 minutes/week of vigorous exercise.

To strengthen muscles specific exercises for major muscle groups should be performed three days/week with 48 hours rest between sessions.

So, simply put, for optimum health performers should try to put together around 30 minutes/day of moderate to vigorous physical activity and include some strengthening exercises around 3 times/week.

What's the right exercise?

Any activity that gives you moderate or vigorous physical work will do the trick. Choose an activity you enjoy to keep you motivated! Ideally something convenient and affordable which is challenging enough to keep you interested. Walking, jogging, cycling, surfing, swimming circuit class, yoga and Pilates are all good forms of exercise.

Performers should also consider choosing activities that balance out their work position, especially if your playing position is asymmetrical. For example, swimming could help compensate for muscle tightness arising from long hours of sitting playing a string instrument.

Of course some forms of exercise are more hazardous than others and should be considered carefully if they put your performance apparatus (i.e. you!) at risk.



How hard should I exercise?

If you are usually inactive and even if you are fit it is advisable to start with a small amount and gradually increase intensity, frequency and duration of exercise over time. This will condition your body evenly and prevent unnecessary injury. Remember your goal is 30 minutes /day for at least 10 minutes continuously!

Moderate physical activity gets your heart rate up and gets you breathing a little more rapidly- you should be able to talk but not sing. Your pulse rate should be around 65% of your maximum (calculate by 220 minus your age multiplied by 65%).

Vigorous physical activity makes you breath deeply and huff and puff. Talking in full sentences between breaths should be difficult and conversation cannot be maintained uninterrupted. Your pulse rate should be around 80% of your maximum (calculate by 220 minus your age multiplied by 80%)

For strengthening exercises choose a very light weight to begin with and work towards the goal of 3 sets 8 repetitions for each muscle group you are targeting (try 3-5 muscle groups per session). Remember safety first and don't overdo it! If you are exercising at a gym ask to talk to a personal trainer or a qualified member of the gym staff. They can often advise you about the kinds of exercises you can perform. Talk to them about your needs and mention that you want to strengthen your body to improve your performance on stage. Mention that you need core strength, endurance and muscle tone but not necessarily muscle bulk. Another option is to go and see a physiotherapist and they can give sets of exercises designed specifically for your fitness level, body and needs. During such a session the physiotherapist can rule out any underlying injuries or conditions that might cause you problems during your fitness training.

Are there any risks?

Exercise is generally safe if you follow the guidelines discussed but it can exacerbate some conditions. It is a good idea to complete the Adult Pre Exercise Screening Tool (see below) or talk to your GP before you start if you are not sure.

There are other risks involved in exercise including but not limited to Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS), musculoskeletal injury, overtraining syndrome and exercise dependence.



Who should I ask for help?

If you are unsure ask your GP who can refer to an exercise specialist like an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or fitness instructor for guidance

ADULT PRE EXERCISE SCREENING TOOL- download from this address

http://www.fitness.org.au/389379_45167311.html

REFERENCES

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/factsheet_adults/en/index.html

AUST GOVT- INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/home/>

AUST GOVT- DEPT OF HEALTH AND AGING

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm>

COCHRANE COLLABORATION

<http://www.cochrane.org/search/site/exercise>