

Performing artists must protect their bodies like athletes

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Whether amateur or professional, performing artists have unique health needs specific to their art form. Musicians, singers, dancers, actors and other performers should always consider their own physical limitations and the dangers of their genre so they can continue to do their best on stage.

"It's easy to see how an athletic dancer might fall and suffer a sprained ankle or broken wrist," said Dr. Kiyomi Goto, a family medicine physician with Penn State Health in State College. "However, every performing artist is at risk for [injury](#), from a singer who strains vocal cords to a violinist who risks carpal tunnel syndrome."

Goto urges every performing artist to establish a good relationship with an appropriate medical professional long before injuries occur.

"A physician who is aware of the passion for performing can work with the artist to develop personalized strategies for avoiding injury," she said. "This type of proactive health care is the best path to a long and healthy life as a performer."

Performers face two basic types of injuries. Acute injuries result from a traumatic event, while overuse injuries are caused by repetitive actions that create small amounts of trauma over time. They can take steps to protect against both:

- Create a reasonable practice and performance schedule that is in line with ability level and conditioning. Just as an aspiring runner takes weeks or months to build to a 5 kilometer race, a performing artist should gradually build intensity and duration to the amount required during a performance.
- Seek [medical attention](#) before minor discomfort turns into an injury that requires weeks or months of treatment and downtime.
- When injuries occur, work with [medical professionals](#) to return gradually to previous performance levels. Discuss any pain or discomfort to understand when you should cut back on your work.

Musicians – especially marching band drummers and orchestral brass players – have the greatest risk of noise-induced [hearing loss](#).

"Even audience members can suffer temporary hearing loss after attending one high-decibel rock concert, so it's no surprise that musicians may face permanent damage over time," she said.

Any performing [artist](#) who is subjected to loud or sustained noise should consider measures to protect against hearing loss, including:

- Hearing checkups custom-fitted musician's earplugs, which reduce decibel levels while maintaining [sound quality](#).
- When possible, rehearse at a sound level lower than needed for performances.
- Avoid other kinds of loud noises or take precautions against the sound produced by snowmobiles, chainsaws or loud televisions so music-induced [hearing](#) loss is not worsened.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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