

Keeping your instrument finely tuned: voice, body, mind and spirit

Health tips for musical theatre performers

As a performer, it's important to keep healthy and in shape – but what does this really mean? You workout, you vocalize, you drink water and you try to eat right; sometimes, though, we forget how interconnected all the aspects of our “performer” are. When one aspect is neglected, they all end up suffering.

Technique is the Key

A solid theatre education foundation and ongoing training are essential to keeping your instrument in shape. Some performers feel they're in “good enough” shape and only hit the training hard just before going into rehearsal, but that won't give you the proper technique to sustain a long run or through a particularly demanding role.

Study regularly with a vocal coach who has both theatre and vocal training and take ongoing movement or dance classes

Look for opportunities to take professional development workshops: in your own community and beyond

Not so common, common sense

There are some things you've been told to do (or not do) a thousand times, yet they still haven't become part of your daily routine. Change that.

Find a family physician and get a yearly physical. It's important to have an ongoing history with a doctor you feel comfortable with

Avoid clearing your throat; use water to help with mucus

Choose to speak softly as opposed to whispering which can put undue pressure on vocal folds (as does crying – never a fun activity) and avoid conversing in a loud atmosphere

Don't avoid the signs that your voice, body or mind is under stress: rest when you are ill, injured or tired and seek treatment

Look beyond the obvious: sometimes when a singer is having vocal trouble it's a sign they could benefit from seeing a massage therapist or chiropractor

Get adequate sleep – it helps with concentration, memory, mood, the ability to resist illness and deal positively with stress

Take time to decompress

It's important to take time for yourself away from the rigours of auditioning, rehearsal and performance to clear your mind and heart, refocus and re-energize.

Go for a walk, take up a new hobby, keep a journal

Take a day trip (or longer!) to escape from the phone, e-mail and Internet

Take a non-theatre related class

Make a conscious choice to have a positive attitude

Take up yoga: good for your body and your mind

Get a massage or Reiki treatment

Dealing with the dry Alberta climate

Drink enough water daily to meet your body's unique hydration demands as opposed to over drinking on audition day, which will only have you running to the bathroom

Avoid alcohol and caffeine.

Herbal teas with lemon and honey can be soothing and can also help ward off colds and flus: try ginger, peppermint or berry tea. Fresh lemon by itself in hot water also works

Neti pots and saline nasal mists (with a one-way valve) can be beneficial, provide they're sanitized after use

Vegetable glycerine thinned with water makes a handy throat spray

Ontario has a unique resource for its artistic community. The Al and Malka Green Artists' Health Centre at Toronto Western Hospital offers fee-for-service treatments as well as those covered by the provincial insurance plan. The medical and therapy staff includes a nurse practitioner, physician, physiotherapists, chiropractors, naturopaths, massage therapists, shiatsu therapists and psychologists. Mental health services account for 50% of the clinic's visits for support for anxiety, stress and depression. The clinic accepts patients from across Canada. The centre offers specialized workshops and classes to the post-secondary artistic community and to the community at large through its foundation.

Special thanks to:

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