

## Clinic: Playing Less Hurt

presented by Janet Horvath  
reported by Lara Mac Lean

Wow!! Janet Horvath's presentation was soooo informative! It was great to learn about preventative measures that we can apply to ourselves and our students. I want my students to be aware of tension levels and steer away from injuries but it is hard to teach them what to look for when they are stuck in a position they resist changing or don't feel pain at the moment.

Janet told us that most musical injuries are soft tissue injuries that are hard to see on any scans. Injuries come from overuse of the same motion. Overuse can be tilting out of alignment, over rotating, over flexing, overuse of same motion, or droopy shoulders. Counter action strengthening is important for overused muscles. Signs before pain include burning, swelling, tingling, numbness and lack of dexterity.

Tight muscles means reduced blood flow. Keep checking for tension in your playing and in students. Be careful of young developing muscles *not* to over use or use incorrectly. As much as possible, avoid static loading of muscles — where they are not moving but are doing work. Teach students to identify the feeling of holding tension. Rest during rests in orchestra — *really* put yourself in a different contrasting *comfortable* position so you *rest* the overused position.

Make careful judgment about student literature choices and practice habits in relation to student size and strength. Letting a student know they need to “bulk up” in order to work on certain literature just might come off as a great motivator.

Make breaks in repertoire. Teach students things they can do away from their

instruments during a physical practice break — rhythm clap and say with their pieces of sight-reading, note identification say and sing with upper register or sight-reading, or just visually going through their piece without the distraction of playing and acknowledging dynamics and articulation.

When you sit or stand, think of how muscle, ligament, tendon and discs are situated. Keep head erect and shoulders down. Teach students to *know* what the proper position is standing and sitting. Proper back support that maintains lumbar curves when sitting is important. Keep your upper body as if you were standing while sitting.

Make sure neck and shoulders are limber. Suggested exercises include shrug shoulders, side-to-side stretch, glances with head, look up and down stretches with head.

Ring splints can support a weak or double joint while you build strength. Make sure fingers release and that curved fingers are relaxed.

Have a proper fitting shoulder and chin rest. There are many sizes and shapes. Have a selection so that students can experiment before buying for themselves.

Stretch before and after practice:

1. Warm up your muscles away from the instrument for 5 peaceful minutes. Walking and then stretching before practice gets the blood moving.
2. Technique warm-up. Schradieck.

3. Warm up each finger placement.
3. Take breaks. Wiggle and re-adjust. Massage fingers, hands and forearms.
4. Vary repertoire. Don't spend large amounts of time on one piece.
5. Increase practice load gradually.
6. Reduce practice time intensity prior to a performance. Muscles can recover and be set and pliable.



Janet Horvath

Yoga, Alexander Technique and swimming are excellent for general conditioning. For strengthening, do isometrics and avoid lifting weights. Be careful with all over-head lifting. A Theracane (a J-shaped device with a knob on the end) is great for digging out those knots in your back — almost as good as a massage! (Theracane phone

number 1-800-603-5107.)

If you do experience pain, apply ice immediately and take a day off. Gradually return. Increase number of times a day you practice before increasing length of practice.

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*Janet Horvath is associate principal cello of the Minnesota Orchestra. Her book Playing (less) Hurt, An Injury Prevention Guide for Musicians is available at book stores, string shops and at [www.playinglesshurt.com](http://www.playinglesshurt.com). †*