

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

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Unique occupational demands for musicians

A musician's hands must work well to play music. Our fingers tell a story through sound and rhythm on an instrument. The complex motions of our fingers make the sound move from page to performance.



The size of the instrument is not made for the musician, which means the musician must adjust to the playing surface. This makes a musician work in an awkward position for many hours every week. Adding to the challenge are finger and hand motions that repeat many times over a single session! These all result in problems that may limit the ability to play. These are called performance-related musculoskeletal disorders (PRMDs).

What is a performance-related musculoskeletal disorder (PRMD)?

PRMDs can include pain, fatigue, swelling, tingling and/or numbness. The timing of these symptoms is not always clear. Some musicians feel symptoms only when playing, but not at other times. Some musicians feel symptoms for hours and days after playing.

Where do people feel PRMDs?

People who play musical instruments feel PRMDs in their hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and/or neck. The alignment of a musician's base of support, spine, neck and shoulders can make the workload uneven. Posture becomes a habit and can be hard to change.

What can a hand therapist do to help?

A therapist will assess the cause of the symptoms, then create a plan to help someone play music without PRMD flare-ups. A therapist will ask about instrument(s), practice and performance schedule, injury history, other jobs, diet and future music goals. This will be used to create a therapy program to improve posture, strength and flexibility to help the musician play without pain. The therapist may suggest a return-to-play schedule and changes to the instrument and practice areas to prevent PRMD flare-ups.

Seeking help from your physician and hand therapist before pain and fatigue limit playing can prevent the start of PRMDs.

