

# PHYSICAL HAZARDS OF THE THRONE

## 13 Exercises to Minimize the Wear and Tear of Drumming by John Platero

**D**rummers play thousands—maybe even millions—of strokes throughout the course of their careers. With that amount of repetitive activity, mechanical wear can occur, which can then cause pain or injury. Over the years I've heard drummers complain of back pain, neck pain, and tendonitis. Like any other athletes, drummers need to be aware of their bodies and take preventive measures to keep themselves healthy.

Over time, repetitive motion of any intensity can deteriorate joints, strain muscles, or create tendonitis. The longer, harder, and faster you play, the greater the mechanical wear. Since all movement originates from the spine, this is where we'll start. (Some of these exercises can be performed at home with no equipment, while others will require basic weights and exercise machines found in most commercial gyms. We also suggest performing them under the guidance and supervision of a certified trainer, to prevent injury and to ensure the best results.)

### THE SPINE AND CORE

The spinal column is a stack of bones that

protects your spinal cord. Other than at the top two cervical vertebrae, between each bone is a cartilaginous disc that acts as a sponge or shock absorber to help us with the forces of movement and gravity. A Swedish doctor named Alf Nachemson discovered that when we sit, there is 30 to 40 percent more intradiscal pressure, compared with standing. When we sit and play drums, we need greater muscular support. Therefore we must address the muscles that help support the spine, the core.

You can train the core in a variety of ways. The abdominals and obliques lie on the front of the body and cause the spine to flex forward. But since drummers sit for long periods of time with their spines flexed, we're going to exercise mostly in a standing position. Perform all of the standing exercises with your feet shoulder width apart. Bend slightly at the knees to activate the quadriceps, which engages the iliotibial (IT) band, a long piece of connective tissue that assists in stabilizing the spine via the gluteus maximus. Unfortunately for drummers who sit to play, the glutes are shut off. If the spine isn't

held straight or upright during play, then most of the muscles in the back (spinal erectors) are also shut off. When neither the glutes nor the erectors are firing, it's referred to as a naked spine. Over time, rotating around a set of drums with a naked spine can cause disc problems.

### PERFECT PRACTICE

The goal with the exercises in this article is to activate the deep musculature of the spine. Practicing the movements slowly allows the neuromuscular system to make a better recording of the movement. With all of these exercises, make sure your posture is upright, your upper back isn't rounded, and your head isn't tilted forward or backward. Also keep in mind the law of facilitation, which states that when an impulse passes once through a given set of neurons to the exclusion of others it will tend to do so again, and each time it traverses this path the resistance will be smaller. If you train with incorrect posture, your body will remember that posture, while perfect practice makes perfect performance.

## POSTERIOR TRUNK EXERCISES

The muscles that are usually weak for most drummers are those on the posterior (back) of the trunk. Here are some exercises to do in order to address that area.



### 45-DEGREE HYPEREXTENSION BENCH

If you have access to a Roman chair or hyperextension bench, you can try this exercise. With the back of your calves hooked to the pads, keep your feet pointing straight and hold your body straight as a board with your arms crossed. To progress, extend your crossed arms outward and bend forward. Inhale as you come up to the starting position. Once you're at the top, breathe normally. Do 15 to 25 repetitions.

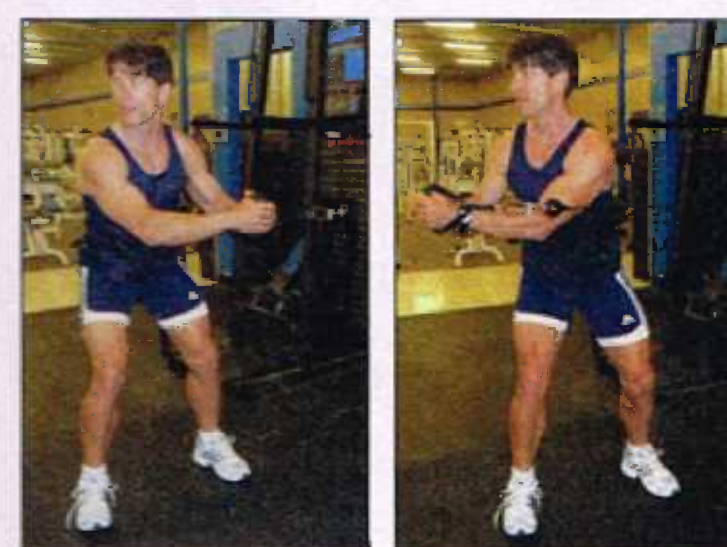
### BENT-OVER ROW

From a standing posture, bend over at the hips, with the chest up, upper back straight, and head in alignment, until you reach near parallel to the ground. Using any kind of weight (dumbbell, barbell, cymbal stand, bucket of water, etc.), row upward for 15 to 25 repetitions. Exhale as you pull. You may do this with both hands at the same time or alternate hand to hand.



### STANDING ROTATION

With your feet apart, knees bent, and butt out, grab the cable or resistance tubing with one or both hands and rotate in a variety of directions (high to low, low to high, side to side, etc.). Stick to one motion at a time and do 15 to 25 repetitions of each. Do the exercises slowly. Allow the entire body to rotate slightly, and exhale as you pull.





## SUPERMAN

Lying face down on the floor, lift your hands and legs off the ground as if you were flying like Superman. Do 10 to 15 repetitions, holding at the top of each repetition for 3 to 5 seconds. Inhale as you come up to the position.



## UPPER- AND LOWER-BODY EXERCISES

For all of the following moves, keep the weight and intensity fairly moderate. Remember that you're awakening muscles and preventing mechanical wear, rather than building muscle. Perform 15 to 25 repetitions of each, and don't forget to keep good spinal alignment.



### LAT PULL-DOWN

Sit with good posture and bring the bar downward toward your chest while thinking of bringing your chest toward the bar. Always monitor the wrists when pulling weights. The elbows should be pointing toward your back pockets, and the wrists should be in line with the forearms, which is in the same line as the cable pulling the bar upward. Inhale on the way down, and exhale on the way up.

### SQUAT WITH A ROW

Grab a cable or resistance tube in each hand. Facing the cable or tubing, extend your arms and squat. Then pull the cable or tube as you ascend from the squat. This exercise will help integrate the upper body with the lower body. Inhale as you descend, and exhale as you ascend.



### HAMSTRING CURL

This exercise can be done with one or both legs. It can also be done on an incline, depending on the type of equipment you have available.



### DORSIFLEXION

This exercise works the muscles in the front of the lower leg. It will help alleviate some of the tightness from the calves. You'll need a dynamic axial rotation device, aka DARD, to perform this exercise, or you can sit on the edge of a bench with a dumbbell balanced between your feet.



### REVERSE CURLS

With an overhand grip, curl a barbell upward. Exhale on the way up.



## STRETCHING

Sitting on the throne for hours at a time will cause some tightness in the pectoralis major (chest), the iliopsoas (hip flexors), and the calves. Here are some ways to stretch those muscles.



### CHEST STRETCH

Wedge yourself in a doorway with your forearms braced against the doorframe. Gently lean into the stretch and hold for 30 to 40 seconds. Repeat 3 or 4 times.

### CALF STRETCH

Stand on the edge of a step, curb, or stage. Gently let your heels drop. Be careful not to let the ankle cave, or else you'll be stretching ligaments instead of muscles.



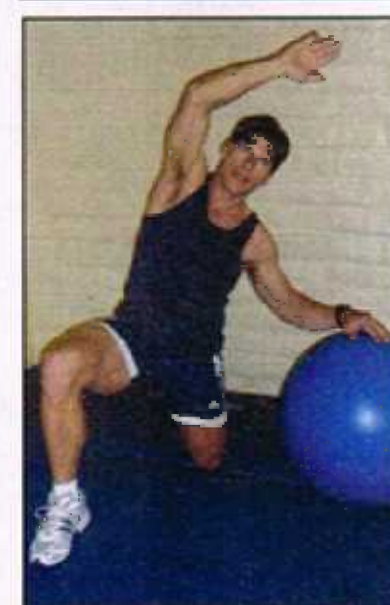
### FOREARM STRETCH

Interlock your fingers in front of you and extend your arms outward so your palms are facing away from you. Then raise your hands over your head.



### HIP-FLEXOR STRETCH

To do this stretch, get on one knee. With the opposite hand, reach as high upward as you can. Now slowly lean toward the knee that's on the ground. Gently lean into the stretch and hold for 30 to 40 seconds. Repeat 3 or 4 times.



It's important to stretch daily, especially before and after gigs. The resistance exercises can be done three or four times a week. And don't neglect some form of cardiovascular exercise. Dance or play sports a few times a week to build your cardiopulmonary system.

John Platero is the director of education for the National Council for Certified Personal Trainers and the author of *Yes, You Can! Fitness After 40: A New Beginning*. He is an award-winning cyclist and has played drums with Cher, Bo Diddley, Frank Gambale, and Robben Ford. For more info, visit [johnplatero.com](http://johnplatero.com) or [nccpt.com](http://nccpt.com).





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