

TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

Like any other athletic activity, playing the whistle, though it may seem quite harmless, subjects you to the stresses of very repetitive movements and postures and certain immobile body positions. Holding unnecessary muscle tension or assuming and holding uncomfortable positions can lead to physical pain and problems. *Always listen to your body.* It wants to relax.

POSTURE AND BREATHING

With any wind instrument it makes sense to have full and unimpeded use of your lung capacity. This is especially true considering the nonstop nature of most traditional Irish music. With the tin whistle you need to be able to inhale deeply and very quickly in order to not interrupt the flow of the music.

Having an upright spine enables you to use your diaphragm to breathe deeply and to relax your entire air passage. Don't stoop over when playing. If you are sitting, sit near the edge of your chair. Some people find that it helps their playing posture to imagine that they have a string pulling up from the top of their head or their breastbone toward the ceiling. Think of being as tall as possible.

GET COMFORTABLE WITH FINGERING AND PLAYING THE NOTES OF THE LOW OCTAVE

Before you proceed further in this chapter it would be wise to make sure that you can comfortably and reliably finger and sound all the notes in the low octave of the whistle. A fingering chart for the tin whistle appears in Appendix C on pp. 452-453.

Start with C-sharp (all holes open) and work your way down the D-major scale, adding fingers one at a time, making sure that each finger is sealing its hole completely before adding another finger. Completely sealing the holes is not something that immediately comes naturally to most people. It takes some practice to develop the needed tactile sensitivity, control, and coordination.

To sound the low-octave notes you need to blow with a moderate force, enough to fill the instrument and produce a solid, low tone, but not so forcefully that you jump up into the second octave. Some experimentation will reveal a way of blowing that is usable for now.

Be sure to learn the names of the notes so you can automatically associate them with their fingerings. Even if you don't read music and never intend to learn, you need to know the names of the notes so that you can communicate with other musicians. This will also help you be able to think more clearly about the music you play.

Practice playing through all the possible combinations of notes, not just the adjacent ones, and learn to move the necessary groups of fingers together as coordinated units. These tasks are more difficult for some people than for others. Be patient with yourself. Try working out some simple tunes by ear, such as easy nursery rhymes that you learned as a child. You will find 17 exercises designed specifically for this purpose, online at <www.greylarsen.com/extras/toolbox>.

ADJUSTING THE OVERALL PITCH OF THE WHISTLE

Some whistles are made in two pieces to allow for easy adjustment of the overall length of the whistle for tuning purposes. You can adjust your overall pitch higher (by pushing in to shorten the whistle) or lower (by pulling out to lengthen the whistle) to match the pitch of other instruments. Experiment and find a position that works well most of the time. You can then fine-tune the instrument as required. Note that excessive lengthening of the whistle's length will adversely affect the *intonation* (or "in-tuneness") of the intervals of the whistle's own scale.

Clearly, when you shorten or lengthen the whistle you are raising or lowering all of its notes. However, it is not obvious, yet very important to know, that this pitch change is not uniform. The pitch of certain notes changes more than the pitch of others. For any given note, the closer the lowest uncovered tone hole is to the foot of the whistle, the smaller the change in pitch.