



*music
performance
student*

Personal Guide To Thriving

Jane Hickey

Table Of Contents

Music Performance Student How To Thrive	2
WELCOME	2
ROUTINES	5
FOOD AND DRINK	12
LIFESTYLE	18
NUTRITION FOR MUSICIANS	24
REFERENCES	26

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

WELCOME

Hello! And welcome to this guide to help you thrive as a musician. The bonus with actions that help you to thrive now will support you not only through your student life but also in your future life as a musician.

Are you living the dream in music? While a life in music may be just that... the chance to follow your dreams after years of dedication and preparation... the reality also comes with the pressures, which may be overwhelming at times. The harsh realities include the challenges of discipline, anti-social hours, loneliness, knock-backs and uncertainties.

Would you like to find a way to cope better with the pressures of life as a musician, so that you really can live the dream?

Musical performance is demanding: cognitively, physically and emotionally. At key times when you're preparing for events such as exams, auditions or concerts, the pressure really steps up as these demands multiply.

With all the care and effort you put into preparing your pieces and looking after your instrument, do you also put care and effort into supporting your own wellbeing for the demands on your body and mind? Do you take extra care of your wellbeing at the times when the demands are even higher?

This guide is for you if:

you'd like to improve your wellbeing

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

you're surviving and not thriving

you're experiencing music performance anxiety

you're struggling with ongoing symptoms

you'd like to optimise your preparation for events

Whether you'd like to optimise your wellbeing in your regular life or whether you'd like to focus on improving your preparation schedule for a specific event, this guide outlines simple steps that you can take. With a holistic view, the most effective preparation for your life as a musician includes not only your musical training but also the wellbeing support for your body and mind. By living your best life, support for your physical and mental wellbeing will also enhance your performance preparation and maximise your opportunities for success and enjoyment in music.

While there are many parts of your life you can't control, this guide helps you to focus on what you can control and changes which you can make, in three aspects of your life. Even small changes in your life can make a difference to your wellbeing. The three aspects include:

Routines

Food and Drink

Lifestyle

Each section outlines:

the impact of this aspect of your life on your wellbeing

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

the benefits of specific diet and lifestyle choices

the realistic changes to help you to thrive

Every change you make will help you to improve your wellbeing, to manage the pressures of life and to support your music performance. By adding in more changes, one by one, you will increase the benefits.

Wellbeing is supported by balance. Changes may be more effective if they are introduced step by step, so that you can manage them and sustain them, without shocking your system.

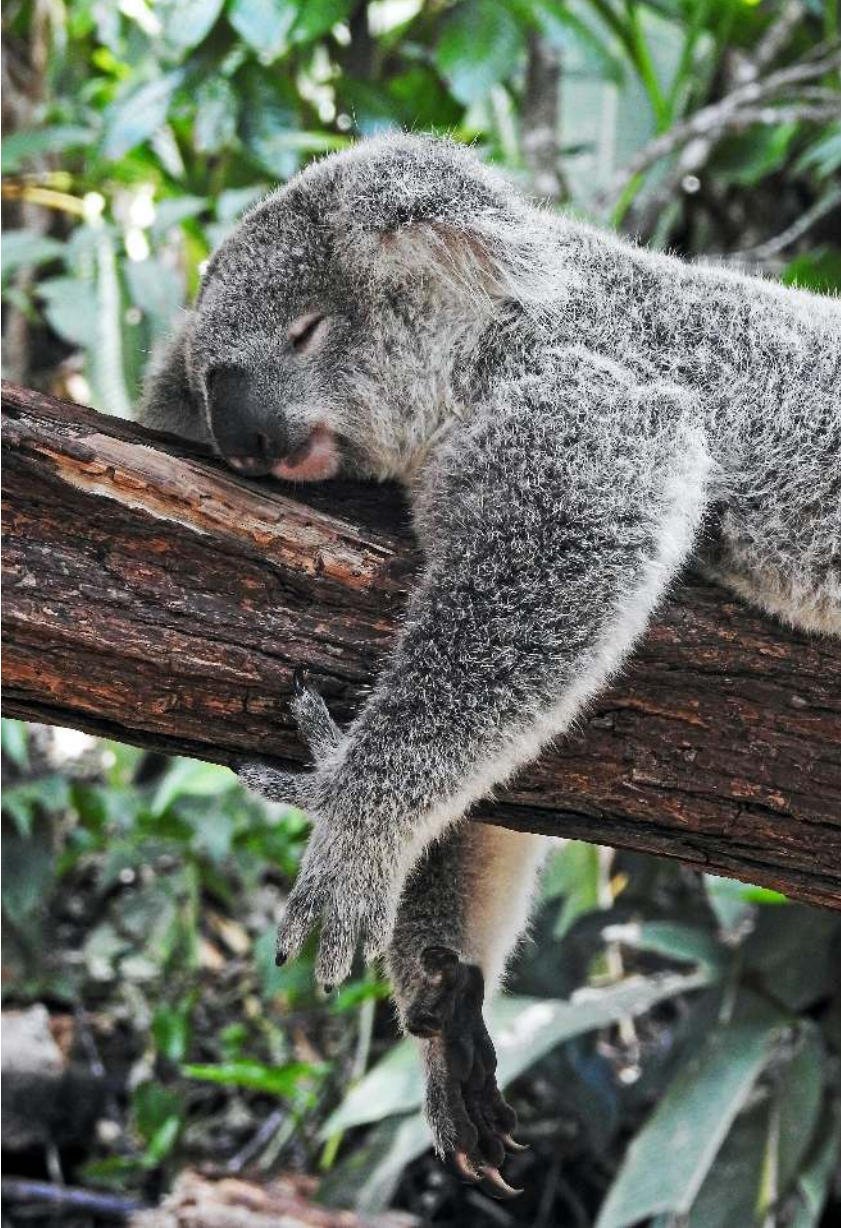
By supporting your wellbeing at times when you have more freedom to make changes, you are strengthening your resources to manage your regular daily life and to support yourself when the pressure really hots up.

Before you read further, please read my disclaimer.

DISCLAIMER

This ebooklet is designed to provide helpful information on the topic discussed, for information and education purposes only. The information presented is the opinion of Jane Hickey and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice provided by your doctor or primary health care provider. No action should be taken solely on the basis of this information. For diagnosis of a health condition and treatment, you are strongly advised to consult a qualified health care practitioner. Please consult your doctor for advice before implementing a diet and lifestyle protocol.

ROUTINES



Music Performance Student How To Thrive

How often do you think about the routines in your life? The thing about routines is that these habitual actions of daily life just seem to happen, without too much need to think about them at all. Many daily and weekly routines create structure and oil the wheels of life. But how often do you think about the impact of your routines on your wellbeing? Did you know that you some routines are more helpful for you and you can improve your wellbeing by making some simple changes in your routines?

Beneficial routines go hand in hand with natural human rhythms, which are regulated by internal body clocks. Are your routines supporting your natural human rhythms? The most fundamental of these rhythms is your daily circadian rhythm, the twenty four hour rhythm regulating sleeping and waking patterns. Other rhythms include digestion and absorption of food and detoxification of mind and body. Simple changes can maximise the benefits for your life in three routines:

Sleeping

Eating

Living in the moment

Many of your fundamental routines may have been adapted to fit in with the routines of your life as a musician. While you may not be able to control all the constraints affecting your routines, what about the routines that you can control? What space do you allow in your life for the fundamental routines to support your health and wellbeing?

Sleep

Sleep is essential for wellbeing. As humans are diurnal, the best time to be awake is during the day and the best time to be asleep is at night. An optimal sleep pattern is waking up feeling refreshed, after about eight hours of uninterrupted sleep during the night. How does your sleep compare with this? Does your routine allow a regular pattern of optimal sleep?

Your music performance hours may mean that you don't have the opportunity to go to bed until very late, which does not allow for eight hours sleep during the night. So what do you do when this just isn't possible?

The timing of music events is out of your control and there may be no escaping the demands of working in the evenings, just like shift workers. You cannot simply opt to have an early night! But you can adapt your sleep routines to minimise the downside of working in the evenings and support these sleep routines fully, when you have the opportunity.

Are you an owl or a lark? It is true that your genes may predispose you to springing into action in the morning or to being drawn to burn the midnight oil. Even if you are an owl, you benefit from a sleep pattern of eight hours at night. Occasions when you are awake through the night are best as an exception. If there are days or weeks when your sleep pattern is disrupted by evening events, support your sleep at these times as well as you can. And pick up optimal sleep routines when schedules allow you to do this.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

If you face sleep problems such as difficulties such as falling asleep or waking during the night not able to go back to sleep, you need to take extra care to support your sleep routines, to overcome these. There are effective strategies to improve the quality of your sleep. One significant reason for sleep difficulties, however, is the presence of troubling thoughts, either temporary or ongoing. These need to be explored and resolved as an essential premise for you to achieve good quality sleep.

What happens during the day supports your sleep that night.

Experience natural light during the day by stepping outside when possible, even for a short time.

Exercise, such as yoga, is helpful, but avoid intense exercise during the evening.

Caffeine in drinks is stimulating and best avoided after 12:00 if it has an impact on your capacity to fall asleep.

What happens in the evenings prepares you for sleep.

When you finish a performance event late in the evening, allow yourself some time before going to bed, to transition from being awake to falling asleep.

Spend some time winding down from the events of the day, clearing your head of busy thoughts.

Avoid eating late, preferably finishing eating at least two hours before bed.

Choose a drink such as a herbal tea with chamomile, oatflower, lavender and limeflower (and not alcohol).

Add Epsom salts or essential oils such as lavender or chamomile to a bath.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Turning off devices, such as phones and computers (at least an hour before falling asleep).

Create a restful atmosphere with soothing sounds or complete quiet.

If you find data helpful, a device such as an Oura ring tracks the quality of your sleep, helping you to measure improvements.

When you are free of evening commitments, put in place a regular routine for effective sleep habits using these strategies.

Eating

Another routine which is supported best by natural rhythms is eating. By allowing your digestion of food to occur during the day, your body is free from the work having to digest food when you sleep. This allows other important processes such as detoxification to occur. During the day, an optimal eating routine of three meals, with no more than two snacks (if these are needed) allows your body to digest your food completely, absorb the nutrients effectively and eliminate waste. How does your eating routine compare with this? Is an optimal eating routine a challenge in your life?

You may not have the freedom to eat exactly what and when you would choose to eat, especially with rehearsal and performance schedules. You may not be at home to cook your meals or you may not have time to cook. There may be times when you have to take what's on offer, when it's on offer. A simple framework for your meals is helpful for your digestion and metabolism.

Breakfast, the meal which breaks the overnight fast and kickstarts the day, is best eaten within an hour of getting up. Early in the day is a good time for a substantial meal, so that later meals are lighter.

Eating your last meal at least two hours before you go to bed allows you to digest your feed before sleep.

One other meal in the middle of the day creates a routine of three meals a day.

Eat snacks only for hunger and avoid eating snacks from habit.

Living in the moment

Existing in today's world is leading most people to spend too much time on the edge of a stress response. The physiological *fight or flight* response is activated by the sympathetic nervous system whenever a threat to your safety is detected. This protective response was vital for the survival of our ancestors who faced life threatening dangers, such as attacks by wild animals. Today the same involuntary response in our physiology is activated to protect us, although the nature of dangers has changed. No longer are we likely to face the threat of a tiger or wild boar in daily life. The dangers of today's world are more likely to be the psychological pressures of life (such as meeting deadlines or excessive workloads), which may be perceived as threats, activating your sympathetic nervous system response. And these pressures may be relentless.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

When your *fight or flight* response is activated, your heart beats faster, your breathing speeds up and your hearing and vision become more acute. These are very helpful if you need to defend yourself or if you need to focus on the task in hand, such as an audition, an exam or a performance. To increase your body's capacity for defence or focus, however, other systems are shut down, such as your digestion, reproductive system and immune system. These systems are also essential for your survival and are activated in the *rest and digest* response of the other branch of your nervous system, your parasympathetic nervous system. These two branches of the autonomic nervous system, sympathetic and parasympathetic, cannot be active at the same time! You cannot be in *fight or flight* and *rest and digest*!

Some stress in life is beneficial but too much stress becomes harmful. Even before you add in the specific pressures of your schedules, you may be experiencing a *fight or flight* state too frequently, with the consequence of little time for the important *rest and digest* state. But if these responses are involuntary, what can you do about it? While you cannot control involuntary responses, you can in fact influence your *rest and digest* response to be activated, by consciously reminding yourself to step out of the stress response.

How often do you stop and allow yourself to take a few moments out of the hectic world all around and simply be in the moment? It only takes a minute or two, to add this into your daily life. Use this reminder to live in the moment once daily, or use it more often if you wish.

"I am ok."

Slow down and check in with yourself.

Ground yourself by looking around at what is under your feet, what is around you... notice the textures and colours.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Focus on some calming breathing.

Remind yourself that, in the moment, "I am ok."

FOOD AND DRINK



Music Performance Student How To Thrive

The food you eat provides you with the vital nutrients for everything your body needs to do. Food is not just for energy and growth but your food is the source of the building blocks your body uses to produce large and complex molecules needed for the functions for you to survive. Your nutrients play key roles in helping you to meet the demands of musical performance. By maximising the value of the nutrients in your food, you can turn surviving into thriving.

How can you maximise the value of nutrients in your food? Quite simply, by making food choices with nutrients that are highly beneficial and avoiding food choices that minimise the nutrient value of your food! By recognising the foods which are beneficial and the foods which are empty of nutrients, you can make choices to support your wellbeing, taking into account:

Beneficial foods

Mediterranean diet

Empty foods

Hydration

Are you making conscious food choices and actively choosing your food and drink to support your wellbeing? Or are you accepting your food choices from what happens to be available or what looks most tempting? The role of food and drink in your wellbeing is too important to be left to chance.

Beneficial foods

Which foods do you need to be eating regularly? These are the foods that provide the nutrients essential for your body to function optimally.

Five a day

By eating your five a day portions of vegetables and fruits, you are supplying your body with a range of nutrients for wellbeing. If you can increase to ten portions (mainly vegetables and some fruits), that's even better! Choose some leafy greens and other vegetables of rainbow colours, and fruits such as berries, apples, pears, apricots, plums, peaches and cherries.

Balanced meals

A portion of protein in your meals helps you to feel full for longer. Include a portion of protein in each of your three meals a day. Although many foods contain some protein, food high in protein include meat, fish, beans, pulses and eggs.

Healthy fats

It's a myth that all fats are harmful for your health. In fact some fats are essential for health. There are different types of fats with different benefits. Read about the unhealthy fats below. Saturated fats are found in foods such as butter, meat and cheese and need to be eaten in small amounts to support your health. Unsaturated fats, eaten in larger amounts, are beneficial for your health. Monounsaturated fats are found in foods such as olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds. Polyunsaturated fats are found in foods such as fish, walnuts and flax seeds and include Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats, which are essential for your body. Omega-6 is found in sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, vegetable oils and nuts. The best source of Omega-3 is oily fish, including salmon, trout, herrings, anchovies, sardines and mackerel. Other sources of Omega-3 include chia seeds, flax seeds and walnuts. Foods with Omega-6 are very common, but the best balance for your health between Omega-6 and Omega-3 is about equal amounts of each.

Mediterranean diet

If you want to take a step further towards making changes in your diet to support your health, the Mediterranean diet may be right for you. The Mediterranean diet became famous when its benefits were recognised from a study of health on the island of Crete in the 1950s. The principles of the diet include:

Core foods to eat every day:

whole grains

vegetables (from the rainbow of colours)

fruits (especially seasonal fruits)

beans (such as chick peas)

herbs (oregano, basil, thyme, rosemary, fennel, bay leaf, sage)

spices (such as garlic, saffron, pepper, cloves, turmeric)

garlic

nuts (raw and not salted or roasted)

extra virgin olive oil (drizzled on vegetables or salads)

Foods to eat twice a week:

portions of fish and seafood

Food to be eaten in moderation:

dairy foods

eggs

poultry

Food to be eaten occasionally:

red meat

Empty foods

Foods empty of nutrients are the foods that it's better to reduce or avoid. Some foods have no benefits for your health and may even be detrimental for your wellbeing. These foods are generally easy to identify. They are best eaten only as an exception or avoided altogether if you prefer.

Sugar and saturated fats

Foods high in sugar and saturated fats, such as cakes, cookies and chocolate. Not only may these foods lead to weight gain but they are inflammatory, with a negative impact on health.

Processed fats

Processed (trans) fats may be known as partially hydrogenated oil or fat. Found in a wide variety of processed baked foods, these fats act as a preservative. These fats are known to be harmful for health.

Highly refined or processed foods

Foods which are highly refined and processed, generally found in packaging with a list of ingredients. If a label has more than four ingredients, it is likely the food is highly processed. These foods are likely to contain trans fats and other ingredients which do not support your health.

Hydration

Nourishing your body is not just about the food you eat but also about what you drink. Basic hydration is essential for life. Optimal hydration facilitates optimal life functioning.

Water

About two litres (eight glasses) of water a day is recommended. This includes water in other drinks such as herbal teas or but be mindful of drinks which are high in sugar, calories or flavourings. Water can be flavoured with a slice of lemon, apple or cucumber, a few mint leaves or a piece of ginger

Caffeine

Caffeinated drinks (in particular coffee, soft drinks, and tea) are stimulating and not as hydrating. Drink these in moderation and add in an extra glass of water when you drink these.

Alcohol

As alcohol is dehydrating, it cannot hydrate you. Alcohol is also high in sugar. If you drink alcohol, be mindful to top yourself up with more water.

LIFESTYLE



Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Whether you have a lot or only a little free time, the activities you choose for that time can make all the difference to your wellbeing. When you're short of time, choosing carefully activities to nurture your wellbeing. When schedules slow down and you have more time, give more time to real self-care.

What is your image of self-care? While a pampering atmosphere and indulgent relaxation may come to mind first, there is a lot more to self-care for your wellbeing. By choosing activities which engage your body and mind, you can maximise the benefits of authentic self-care through:

Flow

Exercise

Calm

Are you making time for self-care in your life? Does your lifestyle include activities to optimise your wellbeing, supporting you to keep going with the demands on you and to build the resilience to help you thrive?

Flow

Flow, defined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, describes the process of total involvement with life, the experience of joy and creativity, in some of the best moments of our lives. They are not moments of inactivity but rather moments in activities which are challenging and require skills. It is the opposite of boring. When an activity creates flow, it takes over all your attention, distorts your sense of time, as you lose yourself to the outside world with its problems and anxieties.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Music, appearing in every culture, is a powerful example of an activity which promotes flow. Music promotes flow both as a listening activity and as a performance activity. While the concept of flow may be new to you, it is highly likely that music has been creating flow in your life and that you have already been experiencing the benefits of flow. However, there are other activities which are known to promote flow and taking part in another type of flow promoting activity may also be helpful for you.

By spending some time regularly in an alternative activity which promotes flow allows you to ‘unwind’ from the demands of your own practice routines. These activities are not simple leisure activities but activities which require some action by you. From the wide variety, choose the activity that fits into your life, for the benefits of flow.

Physical activities include sports, yoga, dance, martial arts; creative activities include art, sculpture, photography, painting, woodworking, writing, needlework, cooking; outdoor activities include hiking, horse riding, gardening, and domestic activities include caring for animals or DIY projects

Exercise

Do you have to be an athlete to benefit from exercise? Everyone benefits from exercise! Physical activity not only plays a key role in improving physical health, but also has a powerful role in improving mental health. You are most likely to benefit from the exercise which fits into your routines and which suits you best, because you are more likely to sustain it. You may be genetically suited to exercising at a particular time of day (early or late) or you may be more suited to a particular type of exercise (such as strength or endurance).

Exercise does not have to mean a session at the gym. There are many exercise activities that can fit into daily life without a gym subscription. The starting point to exercising is being active. One of the easiest ways to increase your exercise is to take advantage of any opportunities to walk, such as a brisk walk on the flat or walking up a few flights of stairs.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Different types of exercise have different benefits and you benefit from including all three types. Endurance exercise is exercise which increases your heart rate and breathing over a relatively long duration, such as running or swimming. Strength exercises make your muscles work harder, such as lifting weights, hill walking, dancing, working with resistance bands or push-ups. Flexibility and balance exercises include tai chi, yoga or Pilates. If you want to push yourself more, a HIIT (high intensity interval training) workout combines short bursts of very high intensity exercise with periods of rest or low intensity exercise.

If your exercise is moderate intensity, try to fit in a total of 150 minutes a week, spread over a few days. If your exercise is high intensity, 75 minutes is likely to be enough.

But whatever your preference, make sure your daily life includes being active in your chosen way.

Calm

What image comes to your mind when you think of calm? Maybe you picture a deserted beach? A still lake? A forest walk? Do any of your images of calm capture calm in your daily life?

Whatever your images of calm, they're likely to be juxtaposed to your images of stress. Calm is not self-indulgent luxury, but an essential tool to help you manage the stresses of life. Short bursts of stress in your life are not harmful, and are in fact likely to be beneficial. Unlike the short bursts of stress, however, ongoing stress is harmful for your wellbeing. When you face ongoing stress, you need to protect yourself from its harmful effects. You can do this by promoting calm in your life. The more hectic and stressful your routines, the more you need to benefit from opportunities to experience calm. When you experience calm you are switching off your stress responses and allowing your body not only to recover from the harm of ongoing stress but to build the resilience to manage further stress.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

How do you turn off the stress response? While you may be aware of techniques which promote calm, you can also increase your capacity for calm by activating your vagus nerve. Your vagus nerve, the long wandering nerve in your body, connects your brain with key organs and systems of your body, all implicated in your stress response. Your vagus nerve is primarily recognised for its role in calming the body after a stress response. With a role similar to that of the conductor in the symphony orchestra who recognises the importance of the contribution of each section, each instrument, each musician, your vagus nerve communicates with each section of your body involved in the stress response. By activating your vagus nerve, you are strengthening your capacity to manage stress. There are a number of ways to activate your vagus nerve and strengthen your vagal tone.

Even when life is hectic, there are activities for calm (such as controlled breathing or cold facial water immersion) which you can easily fit into daily life. With more time, you can add in other activities for calm (such as swimming or massage) to increase your power to be able to shut down your stress response.

Listening to music has a powerful influence on brain chemistry, beneficial for sleep, stress reduction, mood improvement and increased activity of the vagus nerve. Listening to music is already a part of your day, but you can still benefit from its effects by choosing music to listen to specifically to support calm.

You may not always have the opportunity for a walk in the forest, to experience the benefits of calm from being in a green space, but if you are near a city park, make the most of the opportunity to spend some time there.

Cold water facial immersion can be part of your normal washing routine, activating your vagus nerve. Let the cold water in the shower splash your face and the back of your neck for a few minutes.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Controlled breathing is an exercise you can easily fit into any day, even last thing at night when you are in bed. By slowing down your breathing and spending the same time breathing out as breathing in, with 5 or 6 breaths in one minute, for about ten minutes.

Massage therapy is becoming increasingly accessible. Time out for a massage session is rewarded for physical relaxation and mental calm.

Swimming is an effective way to reduce the impact of stress. Finding time for a 30 minute swim, especially later in the day, during times of high stress, is highly recommended.

Yoga includes diverse approaches, which all contribute to create feelings of calm.

Meditation techniques are best learned from an expert, either individually or in a group, and are likely to support your stress response.

NUTRITION FOR MUSICIANS

I hope that you have been able to identify some steps that you can take to help you improve your wellbeing? Everyone is unique and the key to thriving is identifying the steps that work for you so that you experience real benefits.

I hope you've made the discovery that you don't have to settle for wellbeing which is adequate but that you can claim wellbeing which is optimal? You will benefit from every step to support your wellbeing and the more steps the more benefits.

I hope this guide has helped you to make the important discovery about the power of diet and lifestyle to support yourself as a musician. As a musician you may not have previously seen an obvious connection between your experiences and the experiences of an athlete. However, both athletes and musicians face schedules which are demanding physically, cognitively and emotionally. The significance of the role of nutrition for athletes has long been recognised, maybe initially because of the nature of significant energy demands, but additionally because of an increasing recognition of the value of specific nutrient support to enhance performance and address specific health issues. An unanticipated added benefit of sports nutrition for athletes is the intrinsic support of the nutrients for other aspects of health and wellbeing. While music may not have previously been considered an activity requiring the same attention to nutrition, the demands of music performance are being increasingly understood within a perspective of health and wellbeing which responds to the support of diet and lifestyle. Your musical performance and your wellbeing depend on the nutrients in your food. Diet and lifestyle choices support musicians for the physical and cognitive demands of musical performance as well as for overall physical and mental wellbeing. The benefits of nutritional support for musicians are maximised when you follow a personalised programme for your unique needs.

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

If you have any questions about making any of the changes outlined in this guide for your wellbeing schedule, please get in touch:

jane@janehickeynutrition.com

If you would like to discuss how I can help you further with a personalised programme, book a free call on my website:

<https://janehickey.co.uk/>

I wish you the very best in your life as a musician.

REFERENCES

Routines

Dr Ameet Aggarwal (2017) *Heal Your Body, Cure Your Mind* Amazon

Dr Satchin Panda (2018) *The Circadian Code* Vermilion

Robert M Sapolsky (2004) *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* St Martin's Griffin

Matthew Walker (2017) *Why We Sleep* Penguin

Food and Drink

Dr Batmanghelidj (2008) *The Body's Many Cries for Water* GHS

Music Performance Student How To Thrive

Oldways *The Gold Standard Mediterranean Diet* Oldways Health Through Heritage

[<https://oldwayspt.org/system/files/atoms/files/MedDietPresentation.pdf> nd]

Lifestyle

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002) *Flow* Penguin

Dr Navaz Habib (2019) *Activate your Vagus Nerve* Ulysses Press

Robert M Sapolsky (2004) *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* St Martin's Griffin

Richard Sutton (2018) *The Stress Code* Sutton Health

