

Staying Healthy On The Road by Del Suggs

Caution: The Surgeon General has found that touring can be hazardous to your health.

Perhaps all performers should receive the above warning when they enter the world of the touring professional. Life on the road can be dangerous. There are long hours, endless miles, lousy meals, and sleepless nights. Some health factors you may have little or no control over, but it's important not to neglect your basic health needs. It can be more difficult to stay well on tour because of the stress of travel and the lack of a routine. But there are some basic steps you can take to reduce the strain on your physical (and mental) health.

Listen to your Mother

The first and most important thing you can do to stay healthy is to avoid unsafe behaviors. You know what those unsafe behaviors are. Don't drive when you're sleepy. Watch your speed and pay close attention to the other idiots behind the wheel. Don't use tobacco products. Don't do drugs. Don't drink. Don't sleep with strangers-- and anybody you just met who wants to sleep with you is a stranger.

In short, don't do all those things your mother told you not to do. She was right.

Sleep Tight

Never underestimate the power of a good night's sleep. If you're not well-rested, all the other stresses you face multiply and take their toll on your health. Sleep is vital to your well-being. It helps your body function properly, and it keeps your resistance to illness strong.

Sometimes it's difficult to sleep soundly when you're touring. There are a few things you can do to help get a restful night's sleep. If you sleep lightly, get some ear plugs. It'll help you overcome your bass player's snoring, and the noise of the chamber maids in the hallway. Try to

book an upstairs motel room instead of the ground floor-- it'll get you away from the automobile racket in the parking lot.

Take time to sleep, even if it means missing the party after your performance. And learn to nap, because just a few minutes of shut-eye can rejuvenate you on a long day.

Eat Right

It's no myth that healthy eating is tough on the road. Everybody from rock stars to traveling sales reps complain about it. That's why the major acts like Elton John bring their own chef with them. It's the simplest way to make sure you're getting the proper nutrition you need for this lifestyle. Unfortunately, it's out of the question for most college artists.

Make it a rule to never eat in your car. It's a good idea for two reasons. First, it's not safe to eat and drive. Second, you can't eat anything healthy when you drive. You can not survive well on cheeseburgers, fries, chicken strips and other one-handed foods. You can't eat a salad driving down the interstate. So make yourself stop and go inside a restaurant to eat.

If you're stuck eating fast-food, find alternatives to the traditional "burger-and-fries." Most of the hamburger chains now have broiled chicken sandwiches and salads. Subway and the other sandwich chains offer healthy choices, too. Avoid fried and high-fat foods. Your arteries and your digestive track will be grateful.

There is one basic rule about roadfood you should always observe: don't buy your meals where you buy your gas. Don't succumb to the temptation to grab a gas station hot-dog when you're filling the tank. You never know how fresh and safe that food is. And you know that it's not nutritionally sound.

Herbs and Vitamins

Doctors rarely promote nutritional supplements. Nutritionists rarely promote doctors. There may or may not be a connection. In any case, vitamins and herbal remedies have become a very popular part of wellness programs. They're not just found in health food stores these days.

Herbal remedies such as echinacea and golden seal can supposedly strengthen your immune system and help you become less susceptible to colds, flu, and virus. Other herbs are touted to ward off depression, help with breathing, and renew your complexion.

If you want to pursue an herbal or vitamin program, you should research it well before you start the regimen. Although vitamins herbs have very high toxic thresholds, there is always the possibility of side effects. They can also react with other medications. Do your homework before you start taking any nutritional supplements, and if you have any questions talk to your doctor.

Working Out

It takes more than just decent nutrition to stay healthy. You've got to get some exercise to keep your body functioning. It also helps to clear your head, and to curb some of the stresses from the road.

Often, the school you're performing at will allow you use their facilities. Take advantage of the weight room, run on the track, or have a swim in the pool. Slip into one of the aerobics classes and really sweat. If you're not quite up to a full workout, try taking a walk around campus. It's a chance to get a little exercise, breath some fresh air, and clear your mind.

Build exercise into your daily routine. It's not that difficult to do. Try avoiding elevators when possible. If you're headed shopping, park on the

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fringe of the lot and hike in. Make a few laps around the mall. There are really lots of ways you can keep moving without consciously working out.

Over The Counter Meds

Assemble a supply of useful over-the-counter drugs for most common illnesses, and keep it in your suitcase. You know your body and health, so pack whatever you might need. There is nothing worse than 2 a.m. heartburn in a strange hotel, except having to go out and find a 24-hour pharmacy.

Make sure you have antacids or other digestive aids on hand to settle an upset stomach. Keep a supply of aspirin, Tylenol, or whatever pain reliever you prefer. Don't forget that these pain relievers work on nearly all pain, not just headaches. They can relieve the backstrain from loading out as well as alleviate the sunburn pain from that outdoor show you played.

Allergies can often flare when you travel because of stress. You may also encounter allergens in new environments. For example, if you have pollen allergies you might suffer attacks when you go to a city in bloom-- and if you travel you might experience spring several times between March and May. Antihistamines are terrific at dealing with allergy symptoms, but be aware they can cause drowsiness in some people and nervousness in others.

Decongestants can help relieve sinus congestion, and help overcome the symptoms of a common cold. If you have trouble with your ears when you fly, you might try a decongestant. Sometime decongestants can help with hangovers, too, as your body may be reacting to alcohol as an allergen and cause a sinus headache.

Don't forget basic supplies like Band-Aids. If you take prescription medications, you should do two

things. First, keep your drugs in the prescription bottle. You don't want to try to convince the local authorities that those pills in the unmarked bottle are really your acne medication. Second, have your prescriptions filled at a national chain, such as Walmart or Walgreens. They keep your prescriptions logged in their computer network, and can get refills on the road.

Blue Cross & Co.

You must have health insurance. It's so important that it bears repeating: You must have health insurance. Find a way to obtain it, either through a group policy for your company or through some other association. The most expensive coverage will be a single policy, but it's the only way to be sure you will get the health care you need.

If you can't afford full coverage, then get a hospitalization policy. These are often offered through your credit cards or even automobile clubs. A hospitalization policy only pays when you are admitted as a patient-- but that is when you are most likely to incur the highest medical expenses. You don't want to spend the next five years paying off your hospital bills in case of an accident or illness.

And even though hospitals deny it, there are constant stories of emergency patients being denied care because they aren't insured. Don't take the chance. Get some kind of insurance. But don't waste your money on specialty policies, such as "cancer insurance" or "accident coverage." These are generally bad investments. Go for broader coverage.

Spiritual and Mental Health

Don't disregard your body's psychological needs. We each have spiritual and mental requirements that should be fulfilled in order for us to stay well. If you have strong religious ties, find a church to attend in the town where you're performing.

If you need to meditate, build the time into your personal schedule.

Call home to your family and friends often, and stay connected. If you worry about high phone bills, then buy phone cards. They make it simple to keep track of your telephone costs, and since you pay for them in advance there is no chance of an outrageous bill at the end of the month.

If you're on-line, get a laptop to stay in touch. If you can't afford your own computer, then checkout the computer labs and libraries at the campus where you're performing. Read the newspaper to keep up with current events. Read books to keep your mind working.

Talk to people at the colleges where you perform. It's important to interact with other humans, whether you tour alone or with a dozen other people. Catch movies at local theaters, go to campus plays, go hear lecturers, visit campus art galleries. Do what ever it takes to get out of your hotel room and car, and get out into the world. It will work wonders to keep you sane.

Rx for Touring

There is no real prescription for staying healthy on tour. And even if you do your best to eat right, sleep well, and exercise, you may eventually catch a cold or flu. But by working to stay healthy, you will become ill less often and you will heal more quickly when you do get sick.

Everyone is different, and everyone has different needs. But you probably know what is healthy for you, and what you really need is the willpower to follow through. You don't have to do the right thing everytime. But the more often you make healthy choices, the greater the chances that you will stay healthy on the road.

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Keeping Associates Healthy *What Your Campus Can Do*

Schools can be very helpful in promoting wellness among touring artists. Whether it's providing for the performers' health needs, or just relieving the stress and anxiety that comes from travel, a little kindness goes a long way. It doesn't have to be expensive, or time-consuming either. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Obtain passes or guest privileges for your performers to use the college exercise facilities. Weight training rooms, the pool, and the track are all welcome.

2. Offer your performers meal choices. Just because the Activity Board loves to eat at Pizza Hut doesn't mean you should always take your performers there. Perhaps they would prefer a vegetarian meal, or seafood.

3. Don't push to entertain after the show. Your performers may have traveled for many hours to reach your campus. Don't drag them to a local bar or to a reception after the performance without giving them the opportunity to turn down the offer graciously.

4. Give them access to the internet. Obtain a guest password for your campus wireless internet. It makes it so much simpler for them to log on to their email.

5. Consider other housing options. If you are providing accommodations for your artists, check with local bed and breakfasts for prices. Frequently the cost at a B&B will be the same, and your performers will have a much more pleasant stay than in the same old Holiday Inn.

6. Understand the performer's rider and technical requirements. Nothing will send an artist's blood pressure through the roof like arriving to perform and finding substandard sound or staging. Make sure you do

it right, so your performer can do his or her job.

7. Get the name and number of a trustworthy local mechanic. Ask around, and find somebody you can recommend should your performer need car or truck repair. Auto problems are a major stress for a touring artist, and an honest mechanic can help.

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