



Piano Ergonomics Guide

Play Without Back Pain

A Practical Guide for Pianists

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Why Your Back Hurts at the Piano

If your back aches after 30 minutes of practice, you are not alone. Research shows that 45% of all musicians with musculoskeletal disorders are pianists, and back and shoulder injuries rank as the second most common site after wrists.

68% of senior professional pianists report playing-related musculoskeletal disorders. The number is lower for amateurs - but that is partly because amateurs quit when it hurts. The pain does not come from playing the piano. It comes from how you sit at the piano.

The root causes: poor bench height, no lumbar support, prolonged static posture, and muscular imbalances from always leaning forward. A standard piano bench forces your back into an unsupported suspended position for the entire session.

Pianists using benches with ergonomic backrests report significantly less post-session soreness, thanks to distributed weight and reduced paraspinal muscle activation. - Electrophysiological assessment study, Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation (2018)

The good news: most piano-related back pain is preventable. It comes down to three things - your posture, your bench setup, and regular stretching. The next four pages cover all three.

The 5-Point Posture Check

Run through these five checks every time you sit down to play. It takes ten seconds and prevents hours of discomfort.

1

Feet

Flat on the floor. Knees at 90-95 degrees. If your feet dangle (kids under 10), use a pedal extender or a sturdy footstool. Dangling feet pull your pelvis forward and collapse your lower back within minutes.

2

Hips

Sit on the front half of the bench - not the back edge. Hips slightly higher than knees. This tilts your pelvis forward and maintains the natural lumbar curve.

3

Spine

Think "tall" not "straight." Your spine has natural curves - maintain them. Slouching compresses the discs. Rigid military posture fatigues the muscles. Find the relaxed middle ground.

4

Shoulders

Dropped and relaxed. Not hunched up toward your ears. If you catch your shoulders rising during a difficult passage, pause and reset.

5

Arms

Forearms roughly parallel to the floor. Elbows at about 90 degrees, resting slightly in front of your torso - not pinned to your sides.

Key rule: adjust your distance from the keyboard FIRST, then adjust height. Most people skip the distance step and wonder why the height never feels right.

Setting Up Your Bench Correctly

The right bench height depends on your body, not a universal number. Because the keyboard height is fixed, taller players sit lower and shorter players sit higher. Use this table as a starting point, then fine-tune with the 5-point check on page 3.

Your Height	Bench Height	Notes
4'8" - 5'2"	20.5" - 21.5"	Footstool if feet dangle
5'2" - 5'8"	20" - 20.5"	Most common range
5'8" - 6'0"	19" - 19.5"	Standard adult
6'0" - 6'4"	18" - 19"	Needs a low-adjusting bench
Kids (4-10)	21" - 24" + footstool	Adjust monthly as they grow

Back support matters. A bench with lumbar support significantly reduces paraspinal muscle activation. This is not a luxury - it is essential for anyone who practices over 30 minutes per day, adults with existing back issues, and children who have not yet developed core strength.

Distance from keyboard: Sit so your elbows rest slightly in front of your center line when your hands are on the keys. Too close forces your elbows behind you (shoulder strain). Too far makes you lean forward (back strain).

The Benchoom adjustable bench covers 19.7" to 24" - ideal for shorter players and growing kids - with a removable backrest for lumbar support. \$289.99 at benchoom.com

5 Stretches Every Pianist Should Do

Before Playing (2 minutes)

1. Neck Rolls

5 slow circles in each direction. Releases upper trapezius tension that builds from looking down at the keys.

2. Shoulder Shrugs

Lift shoulders to ears, hold 3 seconds, drop. Repeat 5 times. Resets the shoulder position that creeps up during playing.

3. Chest Opener

Clasp hands behind your back and lift arms gently. Hold 15 seconds. Opens the pectoral muscles that tighten from a forward-leaning position.

During Breaks (every 25-30 minutes)

4. Seated Spinal Twist

Sit tall, place right hand on left knee, twist left and hold 10 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Mobilizes the thoracic spine - the section that locks up first.

5. Wrist Flexor Stretch

Extend one arm, pull fingers back gently with the other hand. Hold 15 seconds each hand. Prevents tension from traveling up the forearm into the shoulder.

The 30-10 Rule: play for 30 minutes, move for 10. Stand up, stretch, walk around. Your back will thank you after year two of this habit.



Your Next Steps

You do not need to overhaul your entire setup at once. Start with the highest-impact change and build from there.

- ☐ Check your bench height using the table on page 4
- ☐ Run through the 5-point posture check at your next session
- ☐ Set a timer for 30-minute practice blocks with stretch breaks
- ☐ Do the 5 stretches on page 5 before every practice session
- ☐ Consider upgrading to an adjustable bench with back support if you play 30+ minutes daily

Ready to fix your bench?

Browse all Benchoom piano benches - adjustable height, back support, built for long sessions.

benchoom.com/brand/bailanoom/



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