

# Caring for Your Tuba

In order to continue to work properly, it is very important that your tuba be properly maintained. Not only is a tuba a musically artistic device, but it is also a mechanical tool requiring cleaning and service just as any machine would. Fortunately, maintaining a tuba is not a difficult task when the student follows a few simple procedures on a regular basis. The following steps should be taken to keep your tuba looking and sounding great.

Every Time You Play	Once a Week	Once a Month/As Needed
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Wipe fingerprints clean with a handkerchief.</li><li>2. Empty water before storing the instrument in your case.</li><li>3. Oil all of your valves using light valve oil.</li><li>4. Use your mouthpiece brush to remove any buildup that has collected in your mouthpiece.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Grease all of your slides.</li><li>2. Use your flexible cleaner to remove any sediment from your lead pipe.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Bathe your slides in lukewarm water to remove any buildup.</li><li>2. Check your instrument for loose screws or other wear. Notify your teacher if you find any problems.</li><li>3. Clean the exterior surface of the tuba to maintain a nice shine.</li></ol>

## Daily Maintenance

The oil that is naturally secreted from your skin will be deposited on your tuba as you handle it in normal daily playing. Although the resulting fingerprints are not immediately harmful to your tuba, they will attract dirt and will result in a dingy appearance. In addition, the acids contained in your body oil will begin to slowly dissolve the lacquer coating on your instrument, exposing the metal beneath and resulting in oxidation. Besides the obvious unsightliness of a tuba in this condition is the fact that the oxidized metal will rub off onto the player's hands, leaving a filthy residue. To prevent this, simply wipe the exterior surface of the tuba with a dry handkerchief before placing your instrument back in its case each time you practice.

Aside from abusive handling of the instrument by the player, friction is the tuba's greatest enemy. To prevent friction, a tuba must be oiled **every day**. When valves become slow and unresponsive or begin to stick, damage has already begun to occur.

To properly oil your valves, you will need to remove and clean them individually. Do not attempt to oil more than one valve at a time in order to lessen the chance of getting them switched around. Unscrew the top and bottom valve caps. If you have any difficulty removing them, let your director know. Never use any type of force to remove a valve cap.

Once you have removed the valve caps, lift the valve out of the casing and wipe it clean with a lint-free cloth (shop towels work great). Then, wipe out any residue that has accumulated in the valve caps and the interior of the valve casing. Replace the bottom valve cap carefully. Holding the valve over your wipe rag, apply an even coat of valve oil to the entire surface of the valve. Don't overdo it, though. Oil that runs off of your valve is wasted, so try to be conservative. Carefully place the valve back into the casing and rotate it clockwise until the valve locks into place. Tighten the top valve cap and repeat the process for the remaining valves. Refer to the illustrations below for examples of how to correctly oil your valves.

As you play your instrument, saliva and tiny food particles are sometimes expelled into your instrument, creating a tartar-like residue on the inside of your mouthpiece. To prevent this, you should clean your mouthpiece with a mouthpiece brush every time you play your instrument. Make sure to brush both the shank and cup of the mouthpiece. For an extra clean mouthpiece, occasionally rinse and scrub your mouthpiece with rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide then rinse with water.

### **Weekly Maintenance**

The tuba has several slides used for tuning adjustments and emptying water. These slides must be kept in good working order even if they are infrequently used, since a neglected slide will corrode in a remarkably short time. Greasing slides is a simple process that should be done every one to two weeks. Remove each slide one at a time and carefully wipe off the old grease with a lint-free cloth. Apply a small bead of slide grease around the ends of the slide and gently work it back into the tuba, using the instrument to spread the grease along the rest of the slide. Wipe off any excess grease. Repeat this process for the remaining slides. See the illustrations below for examples of how to correctly grease your slides.

If you brush your mouthpiece every time you play you will prevent most obstructions from entering your instrument, but some particles will inevitably collect in the lead pipe of your instrument. Consequently, you should clean your lead pipe every week with a flexible cleaner, often called a "snake." Remove your mouthpiece and the first valve from the tuba and run the flexible cleaner completely through the lead pipe until all sediment is removed. Rinse the cleaner in running water between each pass.

### **Monthly or As Needed Maintenance**

Food particles and other mouth-blown sediment rarely reaches as far into the instrument as the valve slides, but other materials such as excess slide grease and tiny metal fragments from valve wear can collect in these slides. To remove this, you should immerse your slides in a bathtub filled with lukewarm (not hot) water every month or two. A fifteen-minute soak will lift most of this unwanted material, but don't forget to grease the slides before replacing them.

Every now and then you should check your instrument for minor repairs. Examine the valve springs for signs of wear and look for any loose screws. You should also check all of the braces throughout the instrument to make sure none of the solder connections have broken loose. Tell your teacher if you find anything needing attention.

Occasionally you will want to polish your instrument to keep its luster and shine. A tuba should be cleaned using a soft cloth sprayed lightly with non-abrasive furniture polish, such as Pledge. Never spray the polish directly onto the instrument. Never use brass polish on your instrument, as this will cause serious damage to the lacquered finish.

Regardless of the quality of care you give your instrument, occasional repairs and adjustments will have to be made. It is far better in the long run to have repairs made by a qualified technician as soon as possible than to postpone sending an instrument to the shop by making makeshift repairs. Your director can advise you when it is necessary to take an instrument in for repairs.

Even the most gifted musician cannot be successful on an instrument that is not properly maintained. Proper care of a tuba is not a huge, time-consuming task when basic procedures are followed on a daily basis. The result of good tuba care is an instrument that looks and sounds better with less money spent on repairs. Daily maintenance of your instrument is part of your responsibility as a musician.