



Piano Care - New Piano Owners, congratulations, you have just acquired a wonderful new addition for your home! This new addition will not only add beauty to your home, but will also bring musical pleasure to you and your family. Now that you have your new piano, you will want to make sure that you are caring for it properly.

Caring for your piano properly will not only ensure that it plays to its maximum potential, but will also ensure that the value is maintained and, in the case of a new piano, that your warranty is maintained. In this article, I will outline some tips on caring for your piano, including how often you should have your piano tuned, how to help maintain your piano tuning stability, and how to safely clean and care for the exterior of your piano. I will also define piano tuning, and explain why it is necessary for your piano.

**What is a piano tuning and why is it necessary?**

There are over 200 strings in your piano, which are stretched at high tension across the frame of your piano. When a piano technician performs a piano tuning, he or she carefully adjusts the tension of each of the strings in the piano in order to ensure they not only sound in harmony with each other, but that they are also playing in standard pitch (when A sounds at 440 Hz).

While not having your piano tuned regularly will not in itself damage the piano, playing on a piano that is not in proper tune can be very de-motivating for anyone trying to practice on that instrument. It is common to hear children commenting to their parents that their piano at home does not sound or feel as good as their teacher's piano. This is usually more due to the fact that the piano has not been regularly serviced, rather than that the piano at home is an inferior piano. Not having your piano tuned regularly also increases the risk that problems occurring in the piano due to environmental factors will go unnoticed. This could lead to more permanent and costly damage. In addition, it is more difficult to tune a piano that has not been regularly serviced.

### **How often should I have my piano tuned?**

Generally a piano should be tuned twice per year in order to keep it in good playing condition. Please note that a piano will go out of tune whether it is played or not. A brand new piano or a piano with new strings on it will probably need to be tuned 3-4 times in the first year. This is because new strings tend to stretch as they are being worked in, causing the piano to go out of tune more often. A piano that is used quite often, such as one being used all day for piano lessons, or one being used by high level pianists who practice many hours a day, will need to be tuned every 2 - 3 months.

### **How can I ensure better tuning stability in my piano?**

The biggest factor that causes a piano to go out of tune is the temperature and humidity in the room where the piano is located. In more hot and humid weather, the strings and moving parts on the piano will expand, causing the piano to play sharper than standard pitch. In more cold and dry weather, these parts will contract, causing the piano to play flatter than standard pitch. Unfortunately, the parts of a piano do not all expand and contract at the same rate. This not only causes the piano to go sharp or flat, but it causes the piano to sound out of tune with itself. If the room in which the piano is located is too dry, there is the risk of getting cracks in the sound board of your piano. This can seriously hamper the sound of the instrument. If the room is too humid there is the risk of problems such as sticking piano keys, caused by the swelling of the

wooden parts of the piano, as well as a greater risk of rusting strings. While temperature alone does not generally affect tuning stability of pianos, fluctuations in temperature tend to cause fluctuations in humidity. It is therefore recommended that a moderate temperature be maintained in the house throughout the year.

If the temperature and humidity in the room are kept stable, the piano will stay in tune longer. A good way to monitor the humidity in the room is to use a humidistat. This can be purchased at your local hardware store and can be mounted on the wall. The ideal humidity for a piano is between 40% & 50%. In the winter, it is a good idea to have a small humidifier in the room, to control the dryness. Central air conditioning helps to control humidity in the summer. However if you do not have central air conditioning, a dehumidifier may be used. A humidifier or a dehumidifier should be placed in the room with the piano, but not directly beside it.

### **Placement of the Piano in the Room**

Place the piano away from heating ducts, hot air registers and radiators. These items generally dry out the air around them, and can not only affect your tuning stability, but can also cause cracks in your piano's soundboard. Try to keep the piano out of direct sunlight. Direct sunlight can damage the finish of the piano.

Also, be aware of how other items in the room will affect your piano's sound. Items such as carpets and draperies tend to absorb sound, while wooden items tend to amplify it or make it sound more "live". If you feel that the piano you have is either too loud or too muted, try adjusting the items that accompany the piano in the room.

### **Cleaning and Polishing Your Piano**

**Polishing the Piano:** It is generally not recommended to use furniture polish on pianos. The best way to clean a piano is to use a soft cloth which has been slightly dampened and wrung out. A micro fibre cloth is useful for cleaning dust off high-gloss finish pianos. Micro fibre cloths can usually be found in the same section as home car wash accessories in your local hardware store. Piano polishes may be purchased from your local piano store. Some of these polishes are anti-static, and help to keep the dust off your piano.

**Cleaning the Piano Keys:** It is recommended to use a clean damp cloth to clean the tops of the piano keys. In cases where the keys are tougher to clean, a mild soap solution may be used. Make sure to thoroughly dry the keys after cleaning and do not let any water spill down the sides of the keys. Never use any chemicals or cleaning fluids on the keys.

**Cleaning the Interior of the Piano:** It is generally recommended that the inside of the piano be cleaned only by a technician. As there are many breakable parts on a piano, it is best to have a professional take it apart in order to avoid any damage. Dust buildup in the piano may cause the mechanisms to stick or work more slowly.

Taking the time to care for your piano properly and having it service by a qualified piano technician will not only keep your piano in optimal playing condition, it will also maintain the re-sale value of your instrument.