

Chances are that within the first year of having your flute, you may need to take it in to be serviced and or repaired. Some minor problems may be easily fixable on your own though, and it may not be worth taking your flute in to a professional. There are also some ways here to prevent these kind of problems in the first place.

Preventative maintenance

Regular Cleaning

Keep your flute clean! A dirty flute is not a happy flute. Moisture buildup on the inside of your flute can cause damage to pads which will have to be replaced, and corrosion of the inside, causing your sound not to be as full. After every playing session, be sure to clean the inside of your flute and wipe any fingerprints off of the outside. If it starts getting corroded (a black buildup on a silver flute), send it in to a professional cleaner right away.

Proper Treatment

Often people leave their flutes sitting on a stand or a chair, just waiting to be knocked down and damaged. If you have to leave your flute for any length of time, make sure your flute is in a safe place! Put it somewhere where it's not going to get knocked down, or better yet, put it away. Just memorize the position in which your headjoint was and then you'll be able to keep your tuning the same as it was before. Never keep your flute in extreme temperatures or conditions for any length of time, and if it's an expensive one, keep it supervised at all times!

While putting it together, be sure not to grasp it too tightly, and not to hold it by the keys and rods. A lot of people put their flutes together by clutching the key system; THIS DOES EXTREME DAMAGE TO YOUR FLUTE OVER TIME. If you put your flute together this way, expect to be taking it into a repair shop often, costing needless inconvenience and cost.

Take it in for a Regular Check-up and Overhaul

It is a really good idea to take your flute in to an instrument technician, even if there's nothing wrong with it, maybe twice every year (once a year is okay but twice is better). This allows the technician to check out your flute, fix any alignment problems, clean it, and make it perform to its best. Don't let your flute go without a check-up for more than a year, it is very important to keep it in working condition and it avoids having problems when you least need them.

Always remember, to prevent damage in the first place, keep your flute clean, safe, and in good health.

Flute

Care and maintenance

Your flute should provide you with years of enjoyment, but only if you look after it and provide a minimum of care and maintenance. Here are some useful tips for beginners on how to use and look after your new flute.

Putting it together

Number one - do not open your flute case upside down! It's usually quite easy to figure out which way the case opens. If it has the traditional latch system, make sure the latches are flipping up upwards or if it has the sliding latch system, make sure the thinner part of the case is on the top.

There are three parts to your flute: the head-joint, the body, and the foot-joint (the shorter metal tube with only a few keys).

To assemble your flute, pick up the head-joint, making sure not to grab it around the lip plate, and the body. Now, hold the body near the top (the wider open end that has a big empty space), gripping your hand around the empty space (note: never, ever, ever grip your flute by the keys. This can cause serious alignment problems which will cost a lot to repair), and insert the head-joint into the upper part of the body. On newer flutes it should go in smoothly while sometimes on older flutes that have grime built up it will be very difficult to get in and should be cleaned before putting it together.

Line up the hole on the head joint with the keys of the body (this can be adjusted, but this is generally the alignment that works best for most people). Now, holding the body in the same place (with the head-joint now attached), pick up the foot-joint near the end, around the space where there's no keys and attach it to the body, line up the rod of the foot joint with the keys of the body so that the keys of the foot joint are on a forty-five degree angle.

Making a Sound

Start by only playing on your head joint. Take it and move it up to your mouth, your lips should be shaped like

you were starting to saying the beginning of a “whee” sound (the beginning of the “W” should be the shape of your mouth) and your lips should be fairly tight but not overly so. Now, take the lip plate (the part of the head joint around the hole) and place it under your bottom lip so that the hole is centered on your mouth, your bottom lip covers about 1/3 of the hole, and be sure that the longer end of the head joint (the part that will eventually attach to the body) is pointing to the right.

To make a sound, take the hand that is not holding the head joint and cover up the open end. Make a “too” sound and blow air across your flute and you should get a tone. It is very important to remember the “too” part and the beginning of each note. This is called tonguing and must be done at the beginning of every note that you play, even when the notes move very quickly in succession. Tonguing must be learnt as soon as you start because it is easy to get into very bad habits of not doing it that are nearly impossible to get out of.

Experiment by rolling your head joint slightly and see which position gives you the strongest sound. Once you find this “sweet-spot”, try and stick with it all of the time.

Keys and your Fingers

It may look like there's a lot of keys and there's no way that you can possibly play all of those with only ten fingers but some of these keys are never even touched at all and move with other keys.

Since your flute is pointing to the right your left hand should naturally go in front of the flute, and closer to the head joint while your right hand should go behind the flute and closer to the end. Now, as for keys, on your left hand, your index finger should be on not the first key, but the second one, the un-textured one. The next key down is skipped and your middle finger goes on the key after that (so that's four keys down now) with your ring finger on the next key.

The pinky finger of your left hand plays the longer key that sticks out from the flute and the thumb goes underneath and plays the longer, sideways teardrop-shaped key on the side. This should leave the upper portion of the flute resting between your thumb and index finger. Your three right hand middle fingers (index, middle, and ring) play the three keys closest to the end of the body of the flute. The pinky finger plays the little tear-drop shaped key at the top of the foot joint and the thumb just goes underneath the flute to support it (your right hand thumb never plays any keys).

It's not just where you place your fingers that's important though, it's how you place them. You should be pressing down the keys with the PADS of your fingers- not the tips, and not the joints, the pads. This is very, very, very important. If you develop a habit of playing with a different part of your finger, it will be hard to break and you will have difficulty playing faster pieces as your skills advance. Ensure that you are playing with the pads of your fingers.

What to Play

Now that you now how to put your flute together, how to make a sound, and where to put your fingers, try playing a few notes. Stick to things in the middle range (don't attempt really high or really low notes at first). Get a fingering chart and try playing a C (not the first C on the chart but the second one on the third space of the staff). Now try all of the other notes from an A below to an Eflat above.

Now that you have a few notes you need some music.

Now that you know the basics of flute playing you can gradually improve your skills. If you have not already done so, check with someone who knows how to play the flute to make sure that you're doing everything properly and that you haven't developed any bad habits. Even if you can't afford flute lessons full time, maybe try going to just a few when you're starting out to set you on the right track, or get your music teacher to help you.

Cleaning and care of your flute

Items you will need:

- Cleaning rod
- Large, soft square cleaning cloth
- Cigarette papers (available at most newsagents and grocery stores) or
- Yamaha Powder Paper (more expensive)

Cleaning the inside of the flute

As you play, your flute collects moisture from your mouth throughout the inside tube of the flute. If you do not clean this moisture out after each playing session, it can accumulate in your keypads and cause air leaks. To clean the inside of your flute, take a corner of your cleaning cloth and pull it about 3 - 5" through the slit of your cleaning rod. To keep from scratching the inside of your flute, twist part of the cloth around the top of the rod and carefully push it through the body piece of your instrument. Be careful to twist the rod as you clean, so that the metal of the rod does not contact the inside of your flute. Do the same for the headjoint and the footjoint.

Cleaning the outside of the flute

WARNING: NEVER (ever!) USE SILVER POLISHES ON YOUR INSTRUMENT! In fact, it's wisest to leave any major cleaning to a professional. Silver polishes, even polishes that claim to be safe on silver instruments, are not meant for the flute. Not only do polishes strip precious silver from the surface of your flute, but they ruin your keypads and can badly damage the metal of your key system. The entire flute can be seriously damaged in this way.

While tarnish can be pesky, especially between keys, resist the urge to try and remove it on your own. By putting pressure on and between the keys while you clean, you may accidentally change key alignment, causing air leaks when you play. Instead, try to prevent it by gently wiping down your flute with a soft cloth and never playing just after eating. A clean mouth (rinse with water even after brushing to keep toothpaste residue out of the flute) will prevent discoloration of your flute - inside and out - as well as keep food particles from building up in keys. Good care and precaution with your flute will keep professional cleaning bills low.

Sticky Keypads

If you have pads that stick as you play, take a sheet of cigarette paper and place it beneath the sticky key. Gently push the key down, but with a little more pressure than when you play the keys. The idea is to wick the moisture out of the pad with the paper. Repeat as necessary, but be careful not to push down too hard or your pad may be worn or torn. Prevent sticking keys by always rinsing your mouth with water before playing.

Tenons and holes

Don't forget to wipe the tenons (the places where your flute joints fit together) of your flute regularly. They accumulate grease and dirt particles, which make it difficult to connect the joints of your flute. The headjoint is particularly important to clean, as it is the weakest joint and can be easily damaged if forced into a sticky joint. (avoid this by never forcing the joint of your instrument).

The embouchure hole of your headjoint should be cleaned regularly, and if you have an open-holed flute, remember to clean the holes of your keys. Particles can build up in these places and can easily be cleaned with a Q-tip; carefully push down the key and swipe with the Q-tip - don't roughly move the Q-tip around or you will damage the key. Stubborn spots should still be approached gently, but to help, dampen (not soak!) the Q-tip slightly in rubbing alcohol. Use only rubbing alcohol, not water or other forms of alcohol, including aftershave, as they will damage the keypads.