



Before You Begin

Preparing to play the didgeridoo - a few things to bear in mind.

This page is like didgeridoo health and safety, practical and important though rarely much notice is taken. Have a read through though as it does and will make a difference to your playing and your ability to play the didge.

Relax

The very first thing to do is relax. Paradoxically, the less you try the easier it is. Resist the temptation (unless you are having a laugh), to blow hard down the tube. Whether sitting, or standing, make yourself comfortable, so that you can hold the didgeridoo to your mouth with ease. I can not emphasise enough - put very little effort into it. The process should be near to that of natural breathing. Many people expand their cheeks to greater or lesser degrees when playing, you do not need to have blown out cheeks to play.

Breathing

Once relaxed, control your breathing with a few breaths in and out. Practice breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathe in quicker than breathing out. Each cycle should take a handful of seconds depending on how fast you breathe but whatever you do, try to make the rhythm of your breathing natural. While breathing in and out concentrate on achieving a smooth motion.

Breathing is one of the most important factors to successful didgeridoo playing. The more relaxed and controlled your breathing, the more you will be able to control your playing. As we get older we become lazy as our minds and bodies realise we only need to use the bare minimum of effort. Therefore we are out of practice in utilising all of our lung capacity.

Below the lungs is a set of muscles called the diaphragm which help you breathe naturally. When you breathe out (exhale), the muscles push upwards helping to regulate the speed and amount you breathe out, and when you breathe in it lowers. Professional didge players have incredible control over the diaphragm increasing their ability to control their breathing and improve playing.

Breathing Exercises

To help with your breathing try this exercise as often as you like, preferably every day for at 5 or more minutes. Find somewhere to lay down (I do this exercise when going to bed). You can rest your hands on your stomach if you want as you will feel the raising and lowering of your stomach as you breathe. Now breathe. In through the nose and out through the mouth.

OK. Now breathe in and out evenly with normal breathing. With each breath increase the amount of air you breathe in and build it up but not to full capacity nor completely empty your lungs - just to a comfortable level. Notice how much more air you are breathing than resting at normal. As you continue to take deep breathes, start to quicken the breath in and slow the breath out. Remember to keep the breathing smooth. You should be able to build this up so that the breathing is smooth but short on the way in and even but very slow on the way out.

Good didgeridoo players are able to breathe in very quickly through their nose either in small breaths or lungfuls and blow out through the didge with longer controlled breaths. This also helps later on when learning to circular breathe.

Although I have suggested this exercise be done laying down, you can of course do it anytime any place because, let's face it we all breathe all of the time!

Posture

Good posture while you are playing is extremely important, especially if you wish to keep your airways clear. Someone took a photo of me playing one day and when I saw it I was surprised to see poor my posture was - bending forward, neck bent, curved back. By changing and adopting a good posture while playing had immediate positive effects on my playing, I found the rhythms I was trying to play easier and found that my playing became more versatile.

Sitting or standing try to keep your back and neck straight which will enable you to regulate and control your breathing much easier.

Obviously holding a heavy wooden didge when standing is not always feasible, and not recommended so if you are able to use a stand of some sort to support the didge, what ever it may be, do so. Hold the didge in a way that is comfortable for you - so long as you are able to relax and play uninhibited.

If you are sitting, the same rules apply - relax and be comfortable. On the floor or on the ground, crossed legged, or leg(s) outstretched it does not matter providing you can comfortably maintain good posture. I have noticed a large number of people who cross one leg under the other leg which is extended. The didgeridoo is supported by the foot of the outstretched leg.

Eating

I don't recommend playing the didgeridoo if you have just eaten a meal. The recently ingested food will still be in the initial stages of being processed by your body and will be in the area near you diaphragm. This will make it harder for your diaphragm to act normally when playing and will make it harder to play as well as normal. The other reason is hygiene, mentioned below.

As an experiment, play a rhythm you can play well before eating and note how your body acts and behaves whilst playing. Eat a meal then repeat the same rhythm, you will find it harder and more physically stressfull to play.

Hygiene

Finally a quick mention about hygiene while playing. You will dribble! As you play and blow air down the bore of the didgeridoo there will be moisture in your breath. After playing for a while the moisture will accumulate and run down the inside of the didge coming out in a veritable pool at the bottom by the bell. This dribble/moisture will contain all the chemicals from your mouth that your mouth uses to start breaking down food (pre-digestive in saliva).

Try to play on a surface that will not be affected by this.

Wiping the mouthpiece clean after and before playing will reduce the risk of germs being spread. This is one to note if you are playing a didge in a shop, stall at a festival etc. as many people often try out didges when looking to buy one. Some ailments may be transmitted through saliva e.g. cold sores so it is wise to give the mouthpiece a quick wipe first.

Playing after eating will add small particles of food that are still in your system and mouth to the saliva and as food is degradable, it may remain in the bore of the didge after playing and attract bacteria which will then in turn start to rot the wood of the didgeridoo. Best to avoid if possible.

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