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Founding member of the Venezuelan Piano Tuner Association and RPT at MPT of America



How to take care of your piano

Within these pages we will give you some brief suggestions about the caring and maintenance of your piano. The information contained within is taken from various experts, manufacturers, technicians and pianists, and **is intended as a guide for** you to keep your instrument in its top condition, hence prolonging the life of your piano, keeping (and even improving) its sound.

Also, is good to remind you that, while every piano factory gives its costumers a warranty against manufacturing defects, it is most certain that this warranty will void if the factory can determine that the piano was not taken care properly, was abused or neglected.

Bear in mind that though most of the information contained within this section is useful for both new and older pianos, there might be some particular cases in which some of them might not apply, which is why you should always remember to **check with your technician** about any doubts you may have.

First of all, it doesn't matter if your piano is a new piano or the 1890 family piano: it will always be made mainly of **wood and metal**, with some parts of **felt and leather**. All of those materials are sensitive to humidity and temperature changes, which may harm your piano if they are not properly taken care of.

When you buy your new piano, the store normally offers you a "warranty tuning" which is meant to make your piano sound well as soon as it arrives to your home. At this point, the piano technician is not only coming to tune your piano: He will also take a look at the location of the instrument to make sure it has been placed right. He will also evaluate the environment and temperature.

From then on, it is your responsibility (and not of the manufacturers or the store that sold you the piano) to keep it in the best conditions by following its manufacturer suggestions and your piano technician expertise.

We will address here some of the most important things to keep in mind when caring for your piano, such as:

- 1) [Humidity](#)
- 2) [Temperature](#)
- 3) [Location](#)
- 4) [Tunings](#)
- 5) [Regulation and Voicing](#)
- 6) [Wood Finish](#)

1) Humidity

The most critical of the environmental threats for your piano is the humidity. Which is measured in degrees of **Relative Humidity (RH)**, most pianos are ment to be kept at 42 degrees RH but, since every instrument is unique, is always a good idea to ask your tuner-technichan.

As described by the [Piano Technicians Guild](#) website: "Relative humidity (RH) is the amount of moisture contained in the air, compared to the maximum amount of moisture that the air is capable of holding".

As for sound and action, excessive dryness causes the piano's pitch to go flat, while high moisture levels make the pitch go sharp. Also, changes in humidity will make the wooden parts to swell and shrink, affecting tuning stability and touch.

Furthermore, not only the sound is altered, but also **the piano itself is harmed**: Excessive moisture will swell the wood and rust the strings and all metal parts, while excessive dryness will distort your piano's soundboard and weaken its glue joints. Repeated changes in the humidity levels will eventually render your piano useless. That is why a precise climate control is so important.

Depending on your needs and possibilities, there are several ways to keep RH under control:

The most effective is the "**Climate Control System**" which, installed inside the piano, will keep it within the factory suggested limits. This is the most recommended solution because it's specifically designed for pianos.

The system consists of a series of dehumidifier rods (depending on your instrument and levels of humidity, could be one or more), a humidifier (if needed), and a humidistat (a control unit, which depending on the environment turns on and off the dehumidifier and/or the humidifier).

Degen's Piano, Inc. is a qualified [Dampp-Chaser Piano Life Saver System](#), installer, and will gladly answer any questions you might have about it.

You may find more on the subject by visiting the PTG's technical bulletin on [humidity control](http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-humidity.php) at <http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-humidity.php>.

2) Temperature

Like humidity, temperature is extremely important for your piano performance: Changes in temperature **will affect basically the metal structure of your instrument**, and that includes the strings. When warm strings expand and pitch goes down, when cooled strings contract and pitch goes up, and because they are not the same length If the piano was tuned at 76F it will go out of tune at 80F and it will also sound out of tune at 72F.

Constant changes of temperature will greatly help loosing the tuning of the piano and will make the instrument unstable. If this condition is maintained for long period it will even **shorten your piano life** the same as humidity does. Ideally, the temperature should be kept **even all year long, between 74 oF and 78 oF**.

3) Location

Location, or where you are going to place the piano also has a great importance Even if you followed all the most important protective measures and are sure to have a stable

temperature and humidity level, there are places in the room or house where does not matter what you do they will change.

Not only it is important how the piano looks in certain space also try to avoid the following places:

a.- Near a window, specially if that window allows the sun to strike your piano anytime during the day or during the year. Direct sunlight will create heat inside your piano even if the temperature is stable in the room.

b.- Anywhere were currents of air could strike the piano, like near A/C vents or between open doors.

c.- Near any wall or surface that could be wet

d.- Near an open kitchen specially if it is permanently in use and could be exposed to cooking vapor or kitchen grease.

e.- Near any appliance that could create excessive heat or cold (furnaces, chimney, air vents, external doors that open and close constantly).

In the next sections you'll find out that there are three components of musical performance that need to be adjusted periodically: pitch, tone, and touch:

For the pitch to be perfect, each string must be adjusted at the proper tension to get from them the correct sounding, musical intervals. For the tone to be right, a voicing procedure must be applied on the hammers and for the touch to be fit for the pianist the action must be regulated.

"An out-of-tune piano or an unresponsive touch can discourage even novice musicians. Regular maintenance also can prevent expensive repair in the future" (<http://www.PTG.org>).

4) Tunings

In order to get the whole experience of enjoyment when your piano is played, you must keep it always well maintained and tuned. These services are provided to you by a qualified tuner and technician, whose role in preserving your instrument and advising you about what should do to care for it could save you hundreds of dollars in the long run: to rebuild a poorly preserved piano is much more expensive than a good regular servicing.

New pianos tend to go out of tune much faster during the settling period of their lives. After that first warranty tuning, you will probably need to have it tuned three more times during the first year. They also require to be used as much as possible so it settles properly.

In time, after the piano settles (adapts itself to the environment), and its materials reach their "maturity", the tuning will hold longer.

For example: For an average family piano **two tunings a year (or once every six months) are recommended**. However, it may vary depending on your piano, its environment, and the use you give to it. On the other hand, a concert piano, in addition to its regular maintenance, must be tuned before every presentation, and sometimes even during a pause within the performance.

Even further, every piano manufacturer has standards as of materials, designing and building procedures that give different requirements of maintenance to its instruments. In the Technical Bulletin "[What manufacturers have to say](http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-howOften.php#general#general)", published by the Piano Technicians Guild, Inc at <http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-howOften.php#general#general>.

5) Regulation and voicing

In addition to periodic tunings, the action of the pianos also needs to be taken care of. The action of the piano is the intricate system of levers, springs, hammers, pins, screws and keys that make possible for you to press a key and get the hammer to hit a string producing the sound.

The precision in which every piece must be calibrated to keep it functioning **is very important** for the pianist **to be able to control the sound** of his instrument from the loudest scale to the sweetest chord.

Every single part of the action is also made of wood, felt, leather and metal, thus being equally affected by humidity and temperature changes. They are also affected by many other things, such as moving the piano or just material weariness because of the use.

Every once in a while **the action needs to be regulated** to cope with these changes and let the pianist control the instrument at its best.

On the other hand, the piano also needs to be voiced every once in a while: Also because of material weariness, when the felt on the hammers gets either compacted or deformed **it will change the tone** of the note that is played. Commonly, that change is uneven amongst the hammers of the same piano, so **a periodical work of voicing is needed** for that to be fixed.

For more information on this subject, check the [PTG technical bulletin on voicing](http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-voicing.php) at <http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-voicing.php>.

6) Wood Finish

A piano is both a musical instrument and a piece of furniture, which is why you should treat its finish as you would any other wooden surface: keep it clean, don't put beverages or other liquids over it, and avoid scratching it.

You may want to clean it every once in while, **using either a dry or a slightly damp cloth**. You may want to dust it from time to time, as well.

Although **frequent polishing is not recommended**, an occasional polish for the older pianos can be done using a good quality product. Make sure to **ask your piano tuner-technician** about either how to do it or whom to call.

For more information on the subject, refer to [The PTG technical bulletin on finish care](http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-finishCare.php) at <http://www.ptg.org/resources-maintAndRep-finishCare.php>.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1) Are there other ways to protect my piano from humidity?

Yes, instead of the Damp-Chaser Piano Life Saver System, which is still the most recommended, there are other ways, for instance:

a) If you have the resources, some air conditioning systems have also an option for humidity control. You might consider asking your A/C installers about the possibility of upgrading your system. This is the most expensive way to keep humidity under control, but very useful if you have at home other musical instruments, wooden floors and furniture or some sensitive electronic devices that might be affected by environmental moisture.

b) Depending on the size and hermeticity of the room, either a room dehumidifier device, or a room humidifier device, or a combination of both (available in most home appliances' stores) may be used to keep the levels. If chosen, this method will also protect from moisture any other instrument or devices that you keep in such room. However, you must first be sure you buy an adequate system for your room's dimensions. Also, you should bear in mind that this type of system requires a lot of maintenance, as emptying the trays every time they fill up and to keep it always at 42% (unless recommended otherwise by your technician).

Still, you should always **consult with your piano tuner-technician** before making any decision regarding the care of your instrument, in order to make the proper decision.

2) How much time do I have to control Humidity and Temperature before my piano gets damaged?

It is impossible to determine the amount of time your piano will last unharmed without controlling humidity and temperature. It could take between just a few days or last a few years, depending on the amount of humidity or how critical are the temperature changes, as opposed as a lifetime of enjoyment when is properly taken care of.

3) I was told that cooling my A/C will also keep my piano dryer, then why do I need a Climate control?

A/C temperature settings will affect the humidity level, but will not keep it constant and it needs to be kept at the constant suggested level.

4) I was told at the store that my piano has a dehumidifier installed, isn't that enough?

Most people call dehumidifier just a heating rod. When action sticks you can have a dehumidifier rod installed, it will dry enough to unstuck the action, but again it does not control the humidity level, if moisture in the air goes higher it will also go higher in the piano, if it goes dryer, it could over dry the action contributing to damage it later. In no way is a good solution.

The FAQ section of www.degenspiano.com is constantly under construction, so you may find even more answers in there. However, should you not find the information you are looking for, you are welcome to write us to elian@degenspiano.com, stating your name, e-mail and location. We will be happy to answer you as soon as possible via e-mail and post your question with its answer on the website. We hereby compromise to never disclose your e-mail address or any other personal information to third parties.