

Neurologic Music Healing with the Native American Style Flute



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Revisions

05/22/2023 – Spelling and grammar corrections, replaced cover image, and added Flute Harvest workshop to resources list

05/26/2023 – Added QR code for latest version, fixed page numbering issue, and added page header

06/01/2023 – Added disclaimer and references section.

06/20/2023 – Grammar updates, changed Amazing Grace sheet music to match flute graphics of other sheet music (thanks to Clint Goss for review)

Disclaimer

I am not a professional music therapist. The purpose of this manual is to help a person with a neurological disorder to learn how to play a musical instrument. The benefits of playing music are well documented. Music therapy is healing process requiring a college degree and beyond the scope of this document. If you are seeking the skills of a certified music therapist please consult this website: <https://www.musictherapy.org>

A Brief History of the Native American Style Flute

The modern Native American Style Flute (abbreviated NAF) has a history dating back over 60,000 years. The first flutes were probably hollowed bones with holes bored into them. Shortly after the development of bone whistles came flutes derived from hollow reeds and bamboo. All of these materials had the advantage of ready made bores for the sound chamber. With the advent of more modern tools various woods became the material of choice. Cedar is probably the most popular wood for modern NAFs, but cast epoxy flutes, carbon fiber, and even food-safe PVC pipe have seen use in modern times.

The current design of the NAF is descended from the end-blown flute. This style of flute has no slow air chamber or block/bird. The end-blown flute is essentially an open tube with a wedge shaped splitter on the end. The South American Quena or the Japanese Shakuhachi are good modern examples of this style of flute. Unfortunately, end-blown flutes can be difficult to play so a flute with a slow air chamber (SAC) was developed. Also known as a “fipple flute,” the flute with a SAC is much easier for the average person to play. There is also another category of flutes called “whistles”. This family includes the Irish tin whistle, recorders, and the ocarina – just to name a few. These flutes have a mouthpiece like the NAF, but no slow air chamber.

The Healing Effect of Music

Music delights us, makes us happy, makes us sad, and brings rhythm to our lives. It provided communication for our ancestors even before written language. We dance to it's beat even before we are born. Even in the twilight of our lives we remember songs to the very end.

Music helps to calm us during stressful moments. It can motivate us and improve our focus. Most important of all, music can help to heal us.

Listening to music can reduce depression and lighten our mood. Playing music can do more by helping the brain heal. Playing an instrument activates large portions of the human brain. Portions of the brain involved in fine motor control, speech, emotion, and memory are all used in the production of music. Many of these sections of brain are damaged by neurologic disorders. Music can strengthen and restore the brain.

Music provides physical benefits as well. A wind instrument, such as a flute, will help strengthen the lungs and speech muscles in the throat and mouth. The Native American Flute (NAF) is one of many instruments that can help with a neurological deficit. The flute is also one the most accessible music instruments. After all, it is just a tube with six finger holes. But, after playing the NAF, you'll find it can be so much more than a simple musical instrument.

Why the Flute for Neurologic Diseases

One of the first skills to be lost with Parkinson's Disease (PD) is finger dexterity. The stiffening and slowing of finger movements in leads to a condition called micrographia. Micrographia is an acquired disorder that features small, cramped handwriting. The less precise movements brought on by PD can also make performing small precision tasks more difficult. Another deficit commonly seen in PD is soft, slurred speech along with swallowing difficulties. Playing the flute exercises the fingers, mouth and throat muscles and can help reduce the changes from PD.

Learning to Play the Native American Flute

Along with this course you may receive a food safe ABS flute from Northern Spirits flutes. This flute is made from rugged, easily cleaned plastic with a fixed block (also called a fetish). No adjustment of the flute block is required with this flute. If you have a flute with an adjustable block, see the section on adjusting the flute block (next section). For more details on beginning with the NAF, watch this beginning video on the Native American Flute: <https://youtu.be/iZpJSSsJ5Nk>



Figure 1: Northern Spirits A4 Flute

Adjusting The Block

If you are using a Northern Spirits flute skip this section and move on to the “Basic Fingering and Scale Section.”

On top of the flute at the mouth end there are two square holes. The block (often called the bird or fetish) is placed over the hole nearest the mouth end. It shouldn't cover any part of the other hole. Center it over this hole and tie it to the top of the flute by wrapping the leather strap over the block and around the flute twice. The two ends of the leather strap should now hang under the flute. Tie them in a single knot. This is the type of knot that is step one in tying your shoelaces. You will need to tighten this knot from time to time and should be able to do so by just tugging the ends of the leather.



Figure 2: Block attached to flute

Just to be sure you understand what we're talking about, the hole nearest the finger holes should be totally visible, the other hole, totally covered by the block. When the block is positioned just right give the leather a final tightening. Hold the flute out in front of you and check to see that the slot on the under side of the bird is exactly lined up with the first hole. Also check to see that in tightening the block you didn't tilt it to one side or the other. It should be sitting flat on the flat top, or deck, of the flute.

The leather strap should be tight enough to keep the block stable during playing, but it might need to be re-positioned slightly after taking it out of a flute bag, or if you bump it accidentally. While talking about the block, here's an important point. You must never remove it by dragging it off the flute, leather strap and all. This can cause damage or wear to the most important and delicate part of the flute.

Basic Fingering And Scale

Okay. The bird and your mind are both adjusted and you are alone in front of a mirror. You are ready to train your fingers to cover the six finger holes. To explain the next step we will arbitrarily number the holes 1,2,3,4,5,6, with 6 being the hole furthest from your mouth. Now you'll cover holes 1,2,3 with the fingers of one hand (usually the right hand), and holes 4,5,6 with the fingers of the other (usually the left hand). When doing this don't arch your fingers the way you would for piano playing. Instead, keep your fingers fairly straight and use the pads of your fingers to cover the holes. A word on the finger diagrams, the rounded or pointed end of the diagram matches the mouthpiece of the flute (also referred to flute "top"). The square end is the open end of flute farthest from your mouth. More details on holding the flute at this web page: <https://www.flutopedia.com/ergo.htm>

Pentatonic Minor Scale

The Pentatonic Minor Scale is the primary musical scale for Native American Style flutes. The fingering for this scale is shown in the following image.

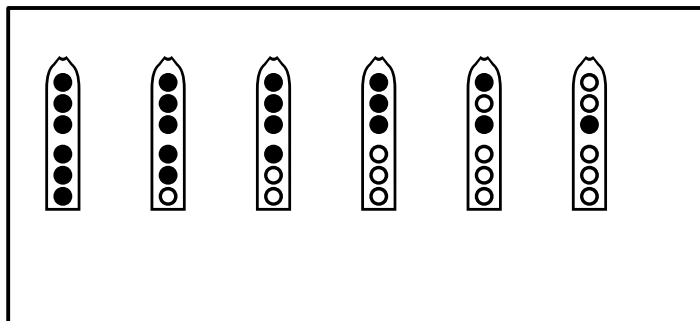


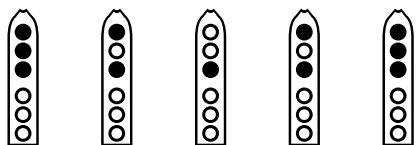
Figure 3: Pentatonic Minor Scale

The mouthpiece in these finger diagrams is at the top and the large open end is at the bottom. Holes displayed in black are covered by a finger.

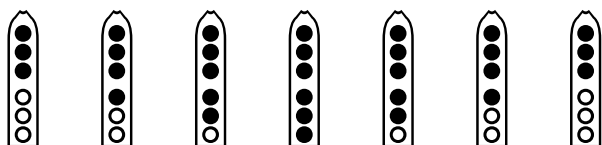
Lesson 1

Let's take your new flute out for a test drive. With the top three finger holes covered, place the mouthpiece against your slightly open lips and blow gently into the flute. You should hear a tone. If the tone sounds weak or raspy try increasing the breath pressure. If you blow too hard it's possible the flute will jump into a higher octave with an unpleasant

high-pitched sound. Also possible are strange squeaks and squawks. While much more common with all finger holes closed these sounds are usually caused by a partially covered hole. Standing in front of a mirror while you're doing this exercise can help you see if the holes are being properly closed. Now try a short scale with the upper holes. Play this pattern with the upper holes. Notice that the third hole from the top stays closed.



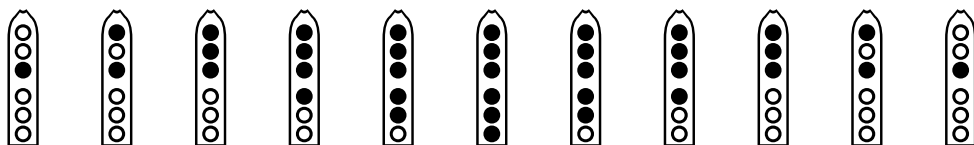
The tones should become progressively higher and then return to the starting point. Try to keep your breath pressure even and your fingers relaxed. Now try extending the scale with this pattern.



The tones should become progressively lower and then higher as you return to the starting point. If the flute squeaks with all holes closed back off on the breath pressure a bit. And make sure all holes are completely covered. Most of all relax and don't forget to breathe.

Lesson 2 – Putting Together the Scale

Now try the whole scale. Start from the top (all holes open except for the third hole) and close finger holes until all holes are closed and open the holes until only the third hole is closed. Blow with a steady breath pressure. You may need to back off on breath pressure slightly as you near all holes closed. Congratulations! You have completed the entire (basic) Pentatonic scale! If you are hearing any squeaks or squawks remember to check your fingers in a mirror for any half-covered holes



Lesson 3 – More Flute Drills

Here are several short drills to advance your playing skills. Just take it slow and at your own speed.

The first drill is the Woven Scale Exercise from Clint Goss (Figure 4). This is an excellent drill for improving finger dexterity. Here is a link to Clint's YouTube video on this exercise: https://www.flutopedia.com/woven_scales.htm

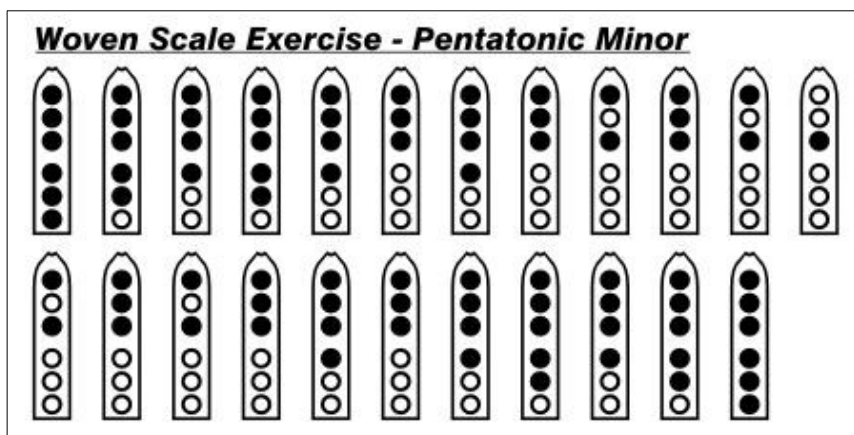


Figure 4: Woven Scale

The next drills are more advanced exercises reprinted with permission from Cornell Kinderknecht. Don't worry too much about reading the music, just use the flute tab symbols as your guide. Work on each exercise in sequence. Remember to breath in the gaps and at the end of each line. These are intermediate exercises so don't worry if you don't sound good at the beginning. After these exercises I have several songs for you to learn!

Upper Hand Workout

Cornell Kinderknecht

The image displays five musical exercises, each consisting of a staff in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. Below each staff is a series of eight vertical finger diagrams, each representing a flute with four finger holes. The exercises are:

- 1A:** A single melodic line with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show a sequence of fingerings for the notes.
- 1B:** A single melodic line with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show a sequence of fingerings for the notes.
- 1A+B:** A combined exercise of 1A and 1B, with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show the sequence of fingerings for the combined notes.
- 1C:** A single melodic line with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show a sequence of fingerings for the notes.
- 1D:** A single melodic line with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show a sequence of fingerings for the notes.
- 1C+D:** A combined exercise of 1C and 1D, with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show the sequence of fingerings for the combined notes.
- 1E:** A single melodic line with a repeat sign at the end. The finger diagrams show a sequence of fingerings for the notes.

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Lower Hand Workout

Cornell Kinderknecht

2A

2B

2A+B

2C

2D

2C+D

2E

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Both Hands Workout

Cornell Kinderknecht

3A

3B

3C

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Twisty-Turny Workout

Cornell Kinderknecht

4A

Musical notation for exercise 4A, first line. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Below the staff are 15 vertical flute diagrams, each with 12 finger holes. The fingerings correspond to the notes: F#4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), B4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), G#4 (all holes closed), F#4 (all holes closed), E4 (all holes closed), D4 (all holes closed), C4 (all holes closed), B3 (all holes closed), A3 (all holes closed), G3 (all holes closed), F#3 (all holes closed), E3 (all holes closed), D3 (all holes closed), C3 (all holes closed).

Musical notation for exercise 4A, second line. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Below the staff are 15 vertical flute diagrams, each with 12 finger holes. The fingerings correspond to the notes: F#4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), B4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), G#4 (all holes closed), F#4 (all holes closed), E4 (all holes closed), D4 (all holes closed), C4 (all holes closed), B3 (all holes closed), A3 (all holes closed), G3 (all holes closed), F#3 (all holes closed), E3 (all holes closed), D3 (all holes closed), C3 (all holes closed).

4B

Musical notation for exercise 4B, first line. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Below the staff are 15 vertical flute diagrams, each with 12 finger holes. The fingerings correspond to the notes: F#4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), B4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), G#4 (all holes closed), F#4 (all holes closed), E4 (all holes closed), D4 (all holes closed), C4 (all holes closed), B3 (all holes closed), A3 (all holes closed), G3 (all holes closed), F#3 (all holes closed), E3 (all holes closed), D3 (all holes closed), C3 (all holes closed).

Musical notation for exercise 4B, second line. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Below the staff are 15 vertical flute diagrams, each with 12 finger holes. The fingerings correspond to the notes: F#4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), B4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), G#4 (all holes closed), F#4 (all holes closed), E4 (all holes closed), D4 (all holes closed), C4 (all holes closed), B3 (all holes closed), A3 (all holes closed), G3 (all holes closed), F#3 (all holes closed), E3 (all holes closed), D3 (all holes closed), C3 (all holes closed).

4C

Musical notation for exercise 4C, first line. The staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Below the staff are 15 vertical flute diagrams, each with 12 finger holes. The fingerings correspond to the notes: F#4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), B4 (all holes closed), A4 (all holes closed), G#4 (all holes closed), F#4 (all holes closed), E4 (all holes closed), D4 (all holes closed), C4 (all holes closed), B3 (all holes closed), A3 (all holes closed), G3 (all holes closed), F#3 (all holes closed), E3 (all holes closed), D3 (all holes closed), C3 (all holes closed).

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Songs for Your Flute Journey

The next three pages have songs for you to learn. This section only scratches the surface of the universe of music available for the NAF. You'll also find yourself improvising your own music when you feel like doing so.

Lakota Courting Song

Traditional

The image displays the musical notation for the 'Lakota Courting Song', a traditional piece. It consists of two staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 4/4. The first staff contains four measures of music, and the second staff contains four measures, starting with a measure rest (indicated by a '5' above the staff). Below each staff are fingerings for the Native American Flute, represented by vertical rectangles with circles indicating finger positions. The first staff has 12 fingerings, and the second staff has 12 fingerings.

Cherokee Morning Song (2)

"Wendeyaho"

Simplified arrangement for NAF by Robert Gatliff

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of a musical staff in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, followed by a Native American Flute (NAF) fingering chart. The NAF chart shows fingerings for the notes G, A, B, C, D, E, and F, with some notes requiring half-holing (indicated by a circle). Below the fingering chart are the lyrics: "wen' de ya ho wen' de ya ho wen' de ya wen' de ya". The second system also begins with a measure rest marked with a '7', followed by a musical staff and an NAF fingering chart. The lyrics for this system are: "ho ho ho ho He ya ho He ya ho ya ya ya".

wen' de ya ho wen' de ya ho wen' de ya wen' de ya

7

ho ho ho ho He ya ho He ya ho ya ya ya

Prayer Note: Repeat to each of the four directions.

Arrangement Note: This arrangement starts the flute on the down beat which is a bit easier to learn. Also the melody is often sung in Blues Major Pentatonic which is problematic when played upon the common Minor Pentatonic flutes. By changing one note, the second 'ho' in the lyrics, the melody now fits the basic scale of the more common flutes.

Neurologic Music Healing with the Native American Flute

AMAZING GRACE

Low Register Version

Nakai Tablature for Native American flute
Fingerings for six-hole pentatonic minor tuning

Traditional melody, lyrics by John Newton
arranged by Clint Goss

A - ma - zing... Grace how sweet the sound. That

saved a poor wretch like me. I ...

once was ... lost but now am found. Was ...

blind but ... now I see.

◆ These notes are substitutes for notes that cannot be played easily on Native American flutes.

From www.Flutopedia.com

Updated February 19, 2011

Native American Flute Resources

What comes next is a very short list of flute resources. There are links to training resources, flute builders, training workshops, and more. A word on workshops, these are great places to build your skills! Even if you have a neurologic deficit, you may find skills once lost start to return.

Education Resources

Horizons Flute School (Jonny Lipford): <https://www.horizonsfluteschool.com>

Flutecast: <http://www.flutecast.com>

Flutopedia: <https://flutopedia.com>

Cornell Kinderknecht Music: <https://cornellk.com>

Learn to Play the Native American

Flute with Ami Sarasvati: <https://learn-to-play-naf.teachable.com>

Flute Makers / Vendors

High Spirits Flutes: <https://highspirits.com>

Stellar Flutes: <https://stellarflutes.com>

Jonny Lipford Music (music and flutes): <https://www.jonnylipfordmusic.com>

Butch Hall Flutes: <https://www.butchhallflutes.com>

Woodsounds Flutes: <https://woodsounds.com/index.php>

Rain Spirits Flutes: <https://www.rainspiritflutes.com>

Books

Learn To Play The Native American Style Flute:

Discover Your Heartsong (Ami Sarasvati) :

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0578509717>

The Native American Flute: Understanding the Gift (John Vames):

<https://www.amazon.com/Native-American-FLute-Understanding-Audio/dp/0974048631>

Calm Forest: Native American Flute Songbook (Wojciech Usarzewicz):

<https://www.amazon.com/Calm-Forest-Native-American-Songbook/dp/8364699148>

Workshops

Vashon Island Flute Gathering: <https://vashonflute.com>

Zion Canyon Flute School: <http://zioncanyonnativefluteschool.com>

Flute Harvest: <https://www.fluteharvest.com/index.htm>

References

Handbook of Neurologic Music Therapy
Edited by Michael H Thaut and Volker Hoemberg
Oxford University Press
ISBN 978-0-19-879261-1

Rhythm, Music, and the Brain
Michael H Thaut
Routledge Press
ISBN 0-415-96475-X

Music As Medicine, particularly in Parkinson's
Daphne Bryan
Clink Street Publishing
ISBN 978-1-91-3340582