

Flute Care

by Jennifer Cluff 2013

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1. Always swab the flute out to dry after playing. This protects the pads from drying, wetting and shrinking, and allows them to wear better. Keeping the flute swabbed allows good pads to last up to ten years between re-paddings.
2. Always handle the flute only by the smooth sections and never grip the moving parts. Twist the flute together, or take apart holding the smooth sections where your hand pressure will *not* bend the mechanism and keys.
3. Polish skin oils off with a micro-fibre cloth. (sold in music shops for flutes; can be laundered/ironed. The fabric wicks up oils.)
Note: excessive polishing can wear off gold and silver plating over several years, so polish gently. Avoid the use of chemical flute polishing cloths (polish dust impregnated in inner cloth) more than once or twice a year. Tarnish removal with chemicals is not safe near pads; so use on headjoint only. Remove all chemical residue with a second, clean cloth so chemicals cannot travel to pad surfaces.
4. Do not use household silver polish on any flute, as it will gradually destroy pad surfaces and allow scoring of the mechanism inside the rods. The flute can be professionally re-polished and dipped remove tarnish every 1-2 years when you send it to an expert technician for a "Clean, Oil and Adjust". Keys and mechanism *must* be removed to clean tarnish from tubing.
5. Always put the flute in its case when not practicing or playing. Laying the flute on a soft surface such as a bed or couch, where it can get sat on, or leaving it on a chair or in an area where others may knock it down accidentally can lead costly repairs.
6. Avoid scratching or denting the embouchure area especially. Other areas can be un-dented or buffed, but not the embouchure edge.
7. Avoid leaving the flute in a hot or cold car. Both heat and cold can affect the glue, mechanics and pads, and cause mechanical playing problems.
8. Avoid polishing the flute roughly and accidently buffing and abrading the pad surfaces beneath the keys. Pad skins are very fragile. To read more about how to prevent (and ignore seasonal) sticky pads go to www.jennifercluff.com/care.htm.
9. Avoid trying to clean between the keys where springs and corks can become unhooked or caught during zealous cleanings. Use blown air to remove dust or fibers from under rods and between keys or a tiny dust-free paint brush.
10. Avoid animal hair where you place your flutecase or flute. A professional flute company that cleans and oils hundreds of flutes a year (Cincinnati Fluteworks) published a care sheet once that claimed that 90% of what they find binding the moving parts of the flute's rods was "pet hair". The fineness of the hair is what allows it to wrap around the inside of the rods as the keys go up and down. If you *do* get pet hair inside your flute case, vacuum it out and then blow air to clean between the keys of your flute.
11. You can put pieces of anti-tarnish strip in a flute case, replacing them every 3-6 months for maximum silver whiteness. The black paper strips are called: 3M Anti-tarnish strips and should be available hardware stores; sold for household silverware protection. They absorb the sulphur that turns silver black. If you can't find them, order from www.fluteworld.com. A 10 year supply is about \$6.
12. Always place the flute with keys uppermost. The weight of the flute's body CAN warp the rods overtime and the moisture from the tube CAN drip onto the pads causing them make sticky noises, and to eventually harden unevenly, causing pad leaks, finger clenching and fuzzy tone.
13. Keep your touch light: Finger all notes lightly and the flute's pads will not become compressed, and will seal well and evenly for years.
14. A readjustment of the flute's pads (new pads are noted for their delicate ability to seal without additional finger pressure) is a normal procedure after the first 3-8 months of playing a new flute. The flute will have 'settled' and need minor final adjustments. This should be covered in any warranty, and costs about \$40 to \$80.
15. Do not leave the flute unattended in public places. Take a detailed series of photos for insurance purposes, and write down the flute's serial number (found on the strapping nearest the trill keys or on the barrel).
16. Always value the flute at replacement cost with insurance companies. Get a valuation receipt from your repair person every year when you take the flute to be cleaned and oiled.
17. Second hand flutes need to be fully cleaned, repaired and oiled before being played. If you don't know there are leaking keys, you will press harder and harder to make notes speak clearly, and possibly develop hand and arm pain after long bouts of practicing.
18. New flutes need to go to the repair shop for a "Clean-Oil-Adjust" every six to twelve months. If you play more than three hours a day, service will be more frequent. Over the long term a well-serviced flute will cost less to keep in good repair.