

The sound of music

Playing the sax feeds my mind, my body and my soul

by **Morris Tait**
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Last year, as a challenge to myself, I joined the local New Ventures Band to play tenor saxophone.

I was 76 years old when my music adventure began — and I did not have any previous musical experience.

I was apprehensive, truth be told, but I soon came to look forward to band practice. And I have discovered that learning to play a musical instrument as a senior is both challenging and fulfilling. And you reap big benefits!

Morris Tait at practice with his tenor saxophone.



Social connections

There's a significant social benefit to joining a band and connecting with others to play music. The environment in the band room is encouraging and supportive, and I have made many new friends.

Breathing

Since joining the band, my breathing has improved. The tenor sax is a big instrument that requires a lot of air, so good respiration and strong lungs are necessary. Because my lungs are now more powerful and more efficient, I have a larger amount of oxygen-rich blood circulating in my body. Studies show that if we flood our brains with plenty of oxygen-rich blood, they thrive. For me, learning to hold that long C note during band practice has actually made my breathing and my brain better.

Concentration and focus

More than anything, I've noticed that playing music has helped my concentration. If I lose attention for a split second, I'm lost in the music and unable to stay with the conductor. I've learned to focus better even when distracted by other instruments, sounds and rhythms. It has been hard work to train my brain to understand new material and use new learning, but it's well worth the effort.

Improved memory and fine motor skills

Along with improved concentration, my memory and fine motor skills have gotten better. Every time I play the sax, my brain works hard to remember the many finger positions on the instrument and, at the same time, recall the notes, key signatures and tempo of the piece we're playing.

Self-esteem

Learning to play music has been a great self-esteem booster. When I began, I was a senior without any music experience, and now I play saxophone in our beginner community band. I gained new confidence, and the positive feedback makes me feel successful.

Relaxation

Playing an instrument is an extremely relaxing habit. When I play, my energy and focus are on the music, the instrument and the notes, so there's no chance for anxiety or negative thoughts to creep in.

And more

The tenor sax and its case together weigh more than seven kilograms, so simply carrying the instrument to band practice is a light workout. And I need more strength and coordination to hold the instrument steady during practice. Keeping my fingers nimble and posture correct

are bonus physical benefits I gain while playing. I have also improved in a number of other areas, including time management (by making time to practice regularly), self-expression (by interpreting the music) and executive-function abilities (through decision-making and problem solving). ☺



The Northumberland New Ventures Band was founded in Cobourg, Ont., in 2014. In this community band, adults come together to learn a new instrument in a relaxing, social environment.



HOW RTOERO HELPS

I first learned about my local New Ventures Band when my RTOERO district provided the group with a \$4,000 grant for a tuba through the RTOERO Project – Service to Others program. The band has added much to the music scene in my hometown of Cobourg, Ont., and provides learning and musical experiences for many retired teachers and other community members.

To maintain a healthy, happy brain, you have to give your mind plenty of hard work to do – and thanks to the New Ventures Band, I've been able to do just that. I encourage RTOERO members to keep their brains active too: Learn to play a musical instrument, learn a new language or write a piece for your district's newsletter.