

If you're a touring musician or road crew member, experiencing back pain while on tour is almost a rite of passage—and not the fun kind. Many musicians ask me, “Why equatemagazine.com does my back hurt more on tour than when I’m at home?” After nearly a decade of hanging around load-ins, rattling through freight elevators, and grinding through long van rides, I can tell you it’s a cocktail of factors, not just one culprit.

From load-in lower back pain caused by improper lifting of heavy road cases to van seat stiffness that turns your lumbar spine into a rock, plus the repetitive strain on muscles unique to your instrument—tour life is brutal on your back. To top it off, adrenaline and sleep debt mess with your pain perception and recovery.



In this post, I’ll break down the top reasons your back hurts more on the road than at home, and recommend tools, habits, and even natural relief options like Joy Organics products to help you stay functional and pain-free throughout the grind.

1. Load-In Injuries and Safe Lifting Techniques

One of the first offenders in the “tour back pain” lineup is definitely load-ins. If you’re hauling heavy cases filled with instruments, amps, or sound gear, improper lifting will wreck your lower back faster than you can say “soundcheck.”

The Problem with Load-In Lower Back Pain

At home, your daily movements likely involve less heavy lifting or doing it more mindfully. But at shows, the pressure to move fast combined with stairs, cramped venues, and broken elevator lifts leads many to just “push through it” — a macho mistake I despise because ignoring proper mechanics compounds injury.

Common mistakes include:

- Bending at the waist instead of squatting properly
- Twisting your spine while carrying heavy road cases
- Overloading one side, causing muscle imbalances
- Not using lifting aids or team lifts when available

How to Lift Safely on Tour

Use these basic principles every time you lift, especially during load-ins:

1. **Plan the lift:** Check your path, test the weight, and decide if you need help or a dolly.
2. **Position your feet:** Shoulder-width apart for stable balance.
3. **Bend your knees and hips:** Keep your back straight—not rounded.
4. **Use your legs to lift:** Powerful leg muscles should do the bulk of the work, not your back.
5. **Keep the load close:** Hold cases close to your body to reduce strain.
6. **Avoid twisting:** Pivot your feet instead of twisting your torso.

Remember, “safe lifting road cases” may sound obvious but it’s too often skipped under tour stress. Over time, this neglect creates chronic load-in lower back pain that makes even small tasks painful.

2. Instrument-Specific Repetitive Strain Injuries

Whether you’re a guitarist, horn player, drummer, or keyboardist, your instrument places unique repetitive strain on your back and surrounding muscles. Imagine the sustained awkward postures, frequent micro-movements, and uneven loading—over days and weeks, these take a toll.

Guitarists and Bassists

Long hours standing with heavy guitars slung on one shoulder cause uneven muscle tension. Tight shoulder and upper back muscles pull the spine out of alignment, leading to lower back compensations and pain. Add in leaning over amps or pedals during setup, and your back starts shouting.

Horn and Wind Players

Often seated with forward head postures, these musicians experience upper thoracic strain that eventually radiates downward, irritating lumbar vertebrae. Neck tightness also disrupts circulation, reducing oxygen delivery to lower back muscles.

Drummers and Percussionists

Their hunched posture over kits, combined with rapid repetitive arm movements, generates both fatigue and tightness in the lower back and hips. Limited recovery time between sets worsens strain.



Using Tools like Kinesiology Tape and a Lacrosse Ball

To combat instrument-specific repetitive strain, I recommend integrating kinesiology tape into your routine. Applying tape around your lower back or shoulders helps stabilize muscles and improves proprioception, reducing muscular imbalance during playing.

Lacrosse balls are a brutal but effective self-massage tool. Use them to target trigger points and tight knots:

- Place the ball between your back and a wall, gently rolling to release tension.
- Focus on gluteal muscles and the thoracolumbar fascia that supports the low back.
- Use short sessions daily, especially after playing.

3. Van Travel Stiffness and Circulation Issues

Spending hours in a cramped van seat absolutely kills your back. I keep a mental list of venues with broken elevators and long load-in stairs—but no list for back-friendly van seats because nearly all of them suck.

The issue? “Van seat stiffness” is a perfect storm of bad posture, vibration, and restricted blood flow:

- Sitting in awkward positions with minimal lumbar support
- Remaining static for hours at stretch limits mobility
- Constant road vibration causes microtrauma to soft tissues
- Circulation slows, starving muscles and discs of nutrients

Strategies to Combat Van Seat Back Pain

- **Use a portable lumbar support cushion:** Maintain your natural spinal curve.
- **Take micro-breaks:** Stop the van whenever safe and walk/stretch for 5-10 minutes.
- **Stay hydrated:** Your muscles and discs need water to stay resilient; avoid skipping water and blaming “getting sick on tour” later.
- **Use compression garments:** These boost circulation and reduce swelling.

4. Sleep Debt, Adrenaline, and Pain Perception

Tour life rarely lets you clock a normal sleep schedule. Instead, you're caught in a swirl of late-night shows, early load-ins, and general chaos. On top of this is the adrenaline pumping from excitement or stress.

This combo—sleep debt and adrenaline timing—mess with how your body perceives pain. Oddly, adrenaline can temporarily mask pain, so you might push through injuries, only to suffer the consequences when you crash. Sleep debt reduces tissue repair and heightens inflammation, increasing overall back discomfort.

How to Manage These Invisible Back Killers

- **Prioritize sleep:** Create a dark, quiet sleep environment and use earplugs beyond foam types; your hearing matters for your career.
- **Consider natural relief:** Brands like Joy Organics offer CBD tinctures and topicals that many touring musicians use for inflammation and relaxation without drowsiness.
- **Use breathing and stretching:** Before bed, gentle yoga or proprioceptive breathing can reduce stress and muscle tension.
- **Listen to your body:** Avoid the macho “push through it” mentality that leads to lasting injury.

Summary Table: Why Your Back Hurts More on Tour

Factor	Cause	Effect on Back	Solutions
Load-In	Lower Back Pain	Improper lifting of heavy road cases	Strain and micro-injuries in lumbar muscles & discs
		Safe lifting techniques, team lifts, and planning	Instrument-Specific Strain
Repetitive posture and micro-movements	Muscle imbalances and tightness, pain referrals	Kinesiology tape, lacrosse ball massage, targeted stretches	Van Seat Stiffness
	Bad posture, prolonged static sitting, vibration	Reduced circulation, stiffness, disc dehydration	Lumbar support cushions, micro-breaks, hydration
Sleep Debt & Adrenaline	Irregular sleep, stress-induced adrenaline spikes	Heightened pain sensitivity, inadequate healing	Good sleep hygiene, natural relief with Joy Organics, relaxation techniques

Final Thoughts

Touring isn't a glamorous party; it's manual labor coupled with physical stress that demands respect for your body's limits. Your back pain on tour is rarely from a single cause, but rather several compounding issues—from lifting heavy road cases without proper form to van seat stiffness and the absence of real rest.

Embrace safe lifting road cases habits, invest time in downtime self-care with tools like kinesiology tape and lacrosse balls, and consider natural relief options like those from Joy Organics to help manage inflammation and discomfort without sedation.

After nine years in the trenches, my biggest advice is to listen to what your back is really telling you—not the macho advice to “push through,” but instead the quiet warnings of overuse and fatigue. Your career is a marathon, not a sprint.