

The Importance Of Muscle Memory When Holding Down Chords On The Guitar

Have you ever watched the way guitarists effortlessly throw a bunch of fingers onto the fretboard to form one chord after another?

The idea of having to contort your fingers into strange, unnatural shapes can be daunting.

With all those strings, frets and fingers all sharing a very narrow space, the fretboard can become very crowded. There's a lot that can go wrong, so precision is crucial.

Learning to play chords correctly takes focus, time, and lots of repetition.

Some guitarists develop bad habits early on which not only make them sound awful, but it affects their confidence, and even their ability to learn further. Some even quit altogether.

This is why it's crucial to develop good muscle memory as early as possible.

Muscle memory (or *finger memory*) is the ability to remember how it feels to play something on the guitar.

When you play something repeatedly, your fingers “learn” to do it automatically.

Being intimately familiar with a chord makes it easier to jump straight to it, as well as move between chords.

This is why you should always pay close attention to the sensations of playing a chord. The tension, the stretching, the position and feel of your wrist and arm, everything.

Here's what you should do when practicing a new chord. First, make sure your thumb is in the right spot otherwise you'll be uncomfortable, and you won't be able to put your fingers where they need to be. The

standard default position of your thumb is in the middle of the back of the neck. However, each chord has its own sweet spot.

Now practice putting down one finger at a time, and get used to the sensation. Then practice putting down all fingers together at once, and do the same.

Get used to the sensation of your fingers, thumb, your whole hand, wrist, arm and elbow. If you feel tense or awkward, relax your shoulders and don't forget to breathe.

As you learn more chords and you learn how to switch from one to another, you'll get used to shifting your thumb around. You'll also find that you can still play a chord well even if your thumb is in a less than ideal position.

After practicing a new chord, try it again in the following ways in order to further develop good finger memory :

- * With your fingers floating above the fretboard
- * Away from the guitar altogether
- * In your mind

Practicing like this is good training in terms of remembering how your fingers (and thumb) should look and feel, and in the case of the last two, you can do them almost anywhere.

If you keep getting stuck in the middle of a song due to mistakes that you feel you shouldn't be making, it's most probably because you haven't learned all the chords as well as you think. Don't underestimate how much a lack of confidence can throw you off.

So go through all the chords that you know and practice them carefully and diligently until you really know them. Develop good muscle memory and you'll notice a big difference.