Foot Care for the Dancer

Shoes

Ballet slippers and pointe shoes should “just” fit. Don’t buy shoes with extra room to “grow into.” Close contact with the inside of the shoe gives improved control, lessening the chance for injury and reducing friction (blisters).

Allow shoes to air dry after use! Keeping them in a closed dance bag will increase odors, allow fungus to grow and shorten the life of your shoes.

When prevention fails…

Closed blisters:
Leave it closed unless the pressure in the shoe is unbearable. Usually the fluid inside will reabsorb and it will heal without threat of infection. Try a corn pad around the border of the blister and a band aid or adhesive tape cover to protect it while it heals.

Open blisters:
Clean it with soap and water or peroxide then apply an antibiotic ointment. Loose skin should be carefully trimmed off. Keep it loosely covered if you can. If you must wear a shoe that contacts the area, use the corn pad and cover described above or create a “custom” corn pad with thin foam or moleskin layers.

Lancing a blister:
Sterilize the blister area with peroxide. Gently cut a small opening, a quarter to third of the way around the base of the blister and press the fluid out. Leave the skin over top, apply antibiotic and cover loosely.

Blister Care

Prevention is the best medicine!
1. Use band aids (expensive) or adhesive tape to “prewrap” vulnerable toes. The shoe can rub on the tape rather than rubbing off your skin. Fold over the lead end of the tape to create a non-stick spot for the pressure area then wrap the tape around your toe to hold it in place. If your feet get sweaty, tape holds better than band aids.
2. Use a small piece of lambs wool tucked into your shoe in a pressure area to cushion and limit abrasion in new areas.

Ankle and Foot Injury Prevention

Proper alignment:
Your dance technique and good ankle strength should work together to prevent injuries.

1. Weight on the ball of the foot centered at the 2nd toe, knee over toe maintained by turnout from the upper leg just under your derriere
2. Strong abdominal support
3. Correct placement of the upper body over the hips is critical for preventing injuries.

The feet and ankles must be strong enough to relevé and stand on demi-pointe or pointe without sickling (rolling to the outside of the ankle) or sitting in your pointe shoe.

Your toes should be straight, not curled in the pointe shoe, so that you are on the ends of your toes. In general, if you have not had an injury, you don’t need any special exercises. Your ballet class work, when done correctly, will help you gain the strength you need. If you are having problems with strengthening, ask your dance instructor for ideas regarding what would help you the most. Physical therapy can help with overall ankle and foot strengthening programs if you are struggling even after working with your instructor or if you have had an injury.

Continued on reverse side
Purpose of warming up:
• You are more at risk for injury if you begin dancing cold
• Your muscles and tendons are not ready to go through large movements before you are warmed up.
• You will have better turnout and technique if you are properly warmed up.

There are three steps to a proper warm-up.
1. Getting your heart rate up
   • You can do this by briskly walking, performing jumping jacks or jogging in place.
   • After two to three minutes of activity, your heart rate will increase and your muscles will be warm enough to safely stretch.

2. Stretching
   • Some of the muscle groups most important to soccer players include the hamstrings, calves, quadriceps, hip flexors, groin, piriformis, lower back and upper back.
   • Stretches should be performed for at least 30 seconds and should not be bounced, but held statically.

3. Dynamic Warm-up
   • Perform range of motion exercises to joints specific to dance.
   • Progress from small movements, to larger movements.

Note: If you sit for a long time between classes or in rehearsal, you may need to repeat the warm-up process as your body will cool down again.

How do I know when I am hurt?
Dance involves movement that is not natural for your body. So sometimes dance techniques can be uncomfortable or down right painful, especially when you are learning something new. Pain lets us know when we are injured. Therefore, it is important to recognize normal dance discomfort versus an injury.

In medicine, we rate pain on a scale of 1 to 10. One is a little tightness or pulling and 10 is so much pain that you need to go to the emergency room. Because you are a dancer, you tend to have a very keen awareness of you body.

Before you dance, take a moment to take a pain inventory.
1. If you notice that something feels different, rate it on the scale.
2. Then begin to dance.
3. You may continue to dance as long as that pain doesn’t raise more than 2 points above your resting state. *(i.e.: you start with a strange pulling in your ankle that you rate a 1 out of 10 pain, you may continue to safely dance until you reach 3 out of 10 pain. Then you need to stop. If you continue to dance to 4 out of 10 pain, you may be damaging your ankle.)*
4. The other part of the 2 point rule, is that the pain must return to the original number within an hour or two after dancing.
5. The next morning the pain cannot be higher than the original number.

Parents need to teach their children how to rate pain on a number scale to make communicating easier. Children need to tell their parents anytime they have an injury or question about a pain.

When should I seek medical attention?
Seek medical attention any time the pain rises more than 2 points above the resting pain scale number, or if the pain does not return to its original resting state.