

Dance Injury Prevention

Tips Every Dancer Should Know



ACTIVE WELLNESS

PERFORM

+ DANCE MEDICINE



1. **Listen to your body.** Pain is your body's way of alerting you to something that isn't right.
2. **Know your body.** Identify your personal strengths and weaknesses, these are areas that often lead to injury. Ask a teacher for their input, listen to constructive criticism for clues about areas that need work, and/or seek comprehensive evaluation from a dance medicine specialist to learn more.
3. **Don't always be biased toward your strong side.** This can create asymmetries that can predispose to injury. Dedicate time to improving on your weak side.
4. **Don't push yourself too hard** in your weak areas until you have addressed underlying causes of weakness and know that you are ready for more demanding activities.
5. **Gain knowledge about basic anatomy as it relates to dance.** This is shown to be one of the best ways to prevent dance injury.
6. **Always practice good warm-ups,** the purpose of which is to awaken proper muscles and prepare them for movement, also to increase body temperature by elevating your heart rate.
7. **Use your cool-downs to work on prolonged stretches for improvements in flexibility.** Be careful to never stretch before your muscles are sufficiently warm. Avoid forced stretching from others.
8. **Work on proper technique and proper alignment before moving on to strength, and repetition.** Technique classes are a foundation to success and injury prevention. Dedicate your efforts as much, or more, to technique as to choreography.
9. **Master easy exercises/movements before moving on to harder ones.** If you have trouble with challenging exercises, go back to the basics and find where your weaknesses are.
10. **Work in both parallel and turned-out.** For injury prevention, your muscles should be strong and confident in both positions.

- 11. Regularly participate in some type of cross-training that complements dance.** Your dance training will benefit from challenging your muscles to work in similar but different movement patterns. Consider mat or reformer Pilates as great options.
- 12. Consider a guided and age-appropriate strength training program that focuses on specific areas.** Weakness is a strong predictor of injury in dance. Research shows that proper strength and conditioning for dancers, not just repetition of dancing, significantly reduces injury rates.
- 13. Be aware of your growth phases.** Injuries are more likely during growing periods. The length/strength ratio changes, sometimes quite rapidly which can lead to a change in demands to joints, muscles, and ligaments. You should consider reducing intensity of dance during a known growth spurt.
- 14. Learn how to use food as a fuel for your body.** Eat a balanced diet that includes proper hydration, healthy fats and plenty of protein for strength and development, as well as healthy carbohydrates for energy. Limit sugar and caffeine as sources of energy.
- 15. Come prepared with the right kinds of meals and snacks when you come to school or studio.** This will help prevent fatigue, which is a precursor to injury.
- 16. Supplement your nutrition if necessary with high quality vitamins,** especially during more stressful times of the year to support higher nutritional needs and provide immune system support.
- 17. Be proactive about bone health.** The adolescent years are essential for building bone density. Supplement with calcium, magnesium and vitamin D, if needed. If you are a female with a delayed (15 years old+) or irregular menstrual cycle, seek evaluation, as estrogen influences calcium deposition in bone, and can predispose to fractures.
- 18. Take care of your body outside of dance.** Be aware of your postural habits at home and school. Wear good shoes that fit properly and provide adequate support to decrease the stress to your feet.
- 19. Rest.** All bodies (especially growing bodies) need adequate rest: daily, weekly, and seasonally. Consider rest as an essential part of your recovery from the demands of dance. Aim for consistent amounts of nighttime rest each day. Aim for 1 day per week of complete rest from dance. Aim to have an off-season from dance each year that may include 3-6 weeks of reduced frequency and intensity and focus on cross-training or injury prevention.
- 20. Talk to a qualified physician about any pain that is recurring, worsening, or lasts longer than 3 days.**

