



Primary Care Sports Medicine  
Dance Medicine Program

Medical Questions and Concerns Related to Dancing on Pointe  
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1. What is the right age to start pointe?

The traditional answer has been the age of 12 with 4-5 years of serious ballet training. This was based on expert opinion from many years ago with no real evidence to support it. Now we have newer research that confirms that this recommendation is not accurate. Today, the best answer is that it is an individual decision. The dancer needs to have the strength in her feet and her hips/core to tolerate dancing on pointe, but also needs the emotional maturity to handle this next important step in her dance career.

2. Will my dancer sustain more injuries on pointe?

The rate of injuries relates to the number of hours a dancer dances per week, not the actual process of going on pointe. When a dancer is dancing on pointe, she is likely taking 2-4 classes per week for several hours at a time. No research exists that demonstrates an increased risk from the pointe shoes alone, assuming the dancer uses proper technique.

3. How does a ballet teacher determine when a dancer is ready for pointe?

There are several screening tools available to determine a dancer's readiness for pointe. Important tests include those that look at a dancer's ability to balance both on a single leg and with eyes closed, her core/abdominal strength, her neuromuscular control which is how she can move through space while performing things such as leaps and turns, the natural point of her foot, and her hip, knee and foot strength while dancing.

4. What happens once a dancer is asked to begin pointe work?

Once a dancer demonstrates readiness for pointe, she will start with pre-pointe work that includes further strengthening as well as exercises to

improve her neuromuscular control. This will not be on pointe initially and may take up to a year. Once ready for actual pointe work, the dancer will do pointe at the barre. Very controlled and deliberate movements will be executed under the watchful eye of the dance instructor. This process may also take some time. Next the dancer will begin work in the center and finally movements across the floor will be introduced.

#### 5. How can dancers keep their feet healthy while doing pointe?

A dancer needs to keep her toenails trimmed straight across at all times to prevent ingrown toenails. She should have a professional fitting for her pointe shoes and have the shoes checked by her dance instructor prior to sewing on ribbons or elastics. Careful attention to placement of padding or lamb's wool to avoid creases rubbing on the toes/feet will help to prevent blisters. If a shoe is painful or rubbing, have it examined by the teacher or the ballet store you purchased it from.

Any pain or swelling in the foot or ankle warrants examination by a physician. Ice and anti-inflammatory medication can help short-term, but should not take the place of an evaluation.

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