

DANCER HEALTH TIPS FROM UAB SPORTS & EXERCISE MEDICINE

What Your Teacher Really Means: Dance Cues That Help Prevent Injury

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In a previous article, we explored [Common Dance Mistakes That Lead to Injury](#) and how simple corrections can make a lasting impact on technique and health. But knowing what to fix is only part of the journey, understanding why instructions are given in class is just as important. The words and phrases teachers use are not just corrections; they are powerful tools that help dancers move safely and efficiently. Let us break down the most common cues and what they really mean for your body.

“Close Your Ribs” = Engage Your Core for Stability

When a teacher says, "close your ribs," they are encouraging dancers to avoid flaring the ribcage forward, which often disconnects the core and leads to excessive arching in the lower back. Engaging the abdominals and keeping the ribcage stacked over the pelvis promotes a neutral spine, preventing lower back pain and creating a strong, stable center for turns and jumps. Imagine zipping up a corset from your pelvis to your ribs.

“Use Your Plié” = Absorb Shock and Generate Power



"Use your plié" is more than just a reminder to bend the knees, it is about using your plié as a powerful spring. A proper plié engages the ankles, knees, and hips together, distributing force evenly and allowing dancers to absorb impact safely. This protects joints from stress and enables higher jumps and softer landings. Visualize a coiled spring preparing to explode upward to help you understand this dynamic action.

“Lift Through Your Arches” = Build a Strong Foundation

Many dancers collapse their arches or sickle their feet, putting them at risk for ankle injuries and poor balance. "Lift through your arches" encourages activation of the foot muscles to create a strong, stable base, improving alignment in relevé, turns, and jumps. Think of your arches lifting like a suction cup gently pulling upward without curling your toes.

“Don’t Sit in Your Hips” = Maintain Balanced Alignment



"Sitting" in your hips refers to leaning or sinking into one hip instead of properly engaging the muscles around the pelvis. This cue helps dancers engage the glutes, hip abductors, and core to keep the pelvis level and lifted, preventing hip and lower back strain. Picture your pelvis as a bowl of water, keep it level so nothing spills out.

“Relax Your Shoulders” = Release Unnecessary Tension

Dancers often hold tension in their shoulders, especially when concentrating. "Relax your shoulders" means dropping them away from the ears and activating the upper back muscles instead. This reduces neck strain and allows for freer, more expressive arm movements. Imagine your shoulder blades gliding gently down and slightly together, as if you are tucking them into invisible back pockets.

“Pull Up” = Create Lift Without Tension

"Pull up" is about more than just standing tall, it is a full-body activation that lengthens the spine and engages the core, legs, and upper back to create a sense of lightness. This helps prevent sinking into joints and improves control, especially in adagio and turns. Visualize a marionette string lifting you from the crown of your head while your lower body stays grounded.

In this follow-up, we see that how teachers communicate these corrections can make the difference between simply hearing a note and truly embodying it. By understanding the deeper meaning behind these classroom cues, dancers can move with greater intention, prevent injury, and dance longer, stronger, and smarter.

About the Author:



Paige Skelton, MS, LAT, ATC is a certified athletic trainer with a deep-rooted passion for dance medicine and injury prevention. With a Master of Science in Athletic Training from Samford University and a Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sport Science from The University of Alabama, Paige specializes in rehabilitation and performance optimization for dancers and athletes across all venues. She currently works for UAB Sports & Exercise Medicine as an Athletic Trainer and Clinical Care Coordinator for **Dale Colorado, DO, MPH**.

Paige has experience working with local dance companies and studios, evaluating, and treating professional dancers, implementing rehabilitation programs, and providing post-performance care. She also served as an athletic trainer for various sports teams, orthopedic clinics, and physical therapy settings, refining her expertise in injury management and movement science. In addition to her clinical work, she has shared her knowledge at national and regional conferences, presenting on topics such as hip dysplasia in dancers and exercise considerations for performing artists. With a background as a dance instructor and choreographer for competitive teams, she brings a unique perspective that blends her firsthand understanding of dance with her medical expertise. Paige continues to advocate for the health and wellness of performing artists through her clinical work, serving as a performing arts liaison for UAB.

For an appointment with the UAB Sports & Exercise Medicine team, please call us at **205-930-8339** or visit us online at uabmedicine.org/sports.