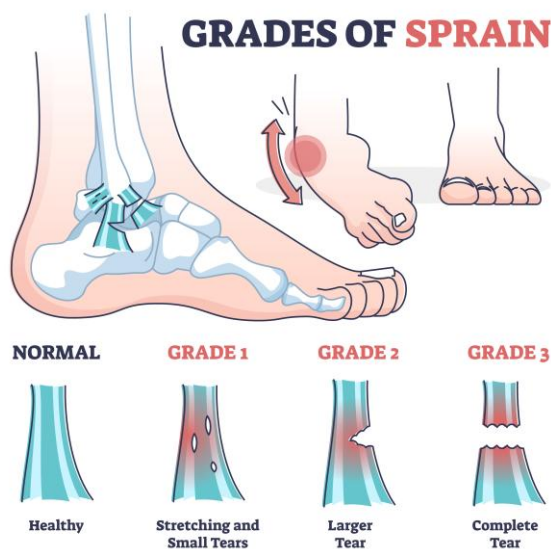


DANCER HEALTH TIPS FROM UAB SPORTS & EXERCISE MEDICINE

Ankle Sprains in Dancers

Dale Colorado, DO, MPH



Ankle sprains are the most frequent injury in dance. Injury rates across all forms of dance can be as high as 31%. Since they are so frequent, ankle sprains are often minimized as being “mild” injuries. However, ankle sprains can be quite debilitating for the dancer and inadequate treatment and rehabilitation may cause recurring issues.

What are ankle sprains? These are injuries that occur when a ligament (or ligaments) that support the ankle joint is stretched or torn. Most commonly, this will affect the lateral (or outside) part of the ankle, and will occur when the ankle turns in, often during jump landings. Ankle sprains can cause pain, swelling,

bruising, limited range of motion, and difficulty with bearing weight.

Ankle sprains are typically treated with rest, icing, compression, and elevation for the first few days. Sometimes crutches, bracing, or a walking boot are needed to offload / support the ankle. Physical therapy may be needed to help regain strength and mobility. In particular, balance and proprioception exercises are important to retrain the ankle muscles. Proprioception is the sensation of where you are in space. This sensation can become impaired with ankle sprains. If ankle sprains are not properly treated, dancers can have residual symptoms that persist longer term, which can put dancers at risk for re-injury or ankle instability.

What can dancers do to prevent ankle sprains? Wearing proper shoes is important. One study on ballet dancers found a significant difference in foot/ankle stability between “new” pointe shoes compared with “dead” or “worn” shoes. Overtraining and overuse can also increase risk for ankle injury. Dancers who require long training periods are more likely to have impaired movement control, which can then increase the risk of dance injury. Finally,

performing core stabilization exercises can reduce the risk of dance injuries, including ankle sprains.

Ankle sprains are very common in dance. It is important not to ignore pain associated with these injuries, especially if lasting more than a week, in order to avoid recurring ankle pain or instability.

Please also see our [February 2025 Dancer Health Tips](#) on cross-training for dancers, and our [November 2024](#) article on best warm-ups before dancing, for more information on ways to prevent dance injuries.

Is there a dancer health related topic you want to learn more about? Or maybe you have a specific question? Send those to us via email (rachel@alabamadancecouncil.org) and we will try to answer them in future articles.

References:

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- Russell JA. Acute ankle sprain in dancers. J Dance Med Sci. 2010;14(3):89-96. Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health. www.danceusa.org/dancerhealth.

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