

DANCER HEALTH TIPS FROM UAB SPORTS AND EXERCISE MEDICINE

What is Dancer's Tendinitis?

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The ankle is the source of many dance injuries. This is due to repetitive ankle dorsi-flexion (raising the foot upwards toward the shin) and plantar flexion (pointing the foot down). Tendinitis of the flexor hallucis longus (FHL), often referred to as “dancer’s tendinitis”, is one of the most common causes of ankle pain.

Dancers may experience pain in the posterior medial (inside portion) of the ankle, particularly during plié or relevé. Ballet dancers may also experience pain when going from demi-pointe to full pointe. Dancers with FHL tendon pain can experience pain in other parts of the foot as well (Figure 1). A “catching” or “triggering” of the big toe may be felt.

The FHL muscle is one of the deep calf muscles and its tendon travels down towards the medial ankle and into the bottom of the foot to the base of the big toe. It helps point the big toe downwards and also helps stabilize the ankle joint.

A detailed history and physical exam, combined with diagnostic imaging such as x-rays or ultrasound, can help the physician differentiate between dancer’s tendinitis and the other causes of ankle pain in this region, such as Achilles tendinitis, posterior ankle impingement, or posterior tibialis tendinitis.

Complete rest is rarely necessary. However, a period of modified dance activities, addressing of muscle strength imbalances, technique, and environmental factors is typically required. Further offloading, medications, and/or injections may be considered for more persistent or severe cases. As is the case with many dance injuries, early recognition is key.

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

About the Author:

Dr. Dale Colorado is an Associate Professor and Vice Chair in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at UAB. He serves as Medical Director of Sports and

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For an appointment with Dr. Colorado or anyone on the [UAB Sports and Exercise Medicine](http://uabmedicine.org/sports) team, please call us at 205-930-8339 or visit us online at uabmedicine.org/sports.

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