

DANCER HEALTH TIPS FROM UAB SPORTS & EXERCISE MEDICINE

Common Dance Mistakes That Lead to Injury – And How to Fix Them

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Dancers strive for precision, grace, and artistry, but small technical mistakes can often lead to chronic injuries and setbacks if left uncorrected. As both a healthcare professional and a dance teacher, I have seen firsthand how minor adjustments can make a significant impact on a dancer's longevity and performance. In this article, I will break down four of the most common errors seen in class, why they matter, and how to fix them.

Postural Alignment and Core Engagement



Several dancers overarch their lower back (swayback) or tuck their pelvis too much, thinking it makes their posture look better. However, both habits create unnecessary tension and throw off balance.

The Fix: Keep a neutral spine, engaging the lower abdominals for stability. Imagine a string pulling you up from the top of your head, lengthening the spine. Keep the ribcage stacked over the pelvis

instead of flaring the ribs forward.

Why It Matters: A misaligned posture puts extra stress on the lower back, hips, and knees, leading to fatigue and pain over time. Proper alignment improves stability, balance, and overall control.

Knee Tracking and Turnout

Dancers often try to achieve a greater turnout by forcing it from the knees or feet rather than using proper hip rotation. This leads to rolling in the ankles, straining the knees, and increasing the risk of injury.

The Fix: Turnout should always come from the hips, not the feet or knees. In pliés and jumps, ensure the knees align with the middle toes rather than collapsing inward. Strengthen hip rotators with exercises like clamshells or side-lying leg lifts to support safe turnout.

Why It Matters: Poor knee alignment can cause long-term knee pain, patellar tracking issues, and hip instability. Proper knee tracking protects the joints and improves balance in movements.

Foot Placement and Weight Distribution

Common errors include sickling the feet, improper weight placement in relevé, and not fully using the metatarsals (ball of the foot) in jumps and turns.

The Fix: Keep the ankles in a neutral position, avoiding rolling in or out. In relevé, distribute weight evenly, especially the first and second toes, to prevent unnecessary strain. Strengthen the intrinsic foot muscles with resistance band exercises and doming drills.



Why It Matters: Proper foot placement reduces the risk of ankle sprains, Achilles tendon issues, and plantar fasciitis, ensuring a stronger foundation for movement.

Breath Control and Tension Release

Dancers often hold their breath or create unnecessary tension in their shoulders, jaw, or hands, making movements appear stiff and restricting oxygen flow.

The Fix: Focus on steady, rhythmic breathing, especially in challenging movements. Regularly check in with the body to release excess tension in the shoulders, neck, and face. Use exhalation to deepen movements like pliés and extensions.

Why It Matters: Proper breathing increases stamina, fluidity, and relaxation, helping dancers move with ease and efficiency.

Injury prevention is not just about avoiding pain—it is about building a strong, resilient body that can sustain the demands of dance. Small, mindful corrections in alignment, technique, and recovery habits can make all the difference in a dancer's performance and long-term health.

By focusing on these common mistakes and simple fixes, dancers can refine their technique, protect their bodies, and enjoy a long, fulfilling dance journey.

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.