**ATHLETES AND THE ARTS**

**Dance Medicine**

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**Injury Prevention Requires:**

* Adequate Nutrition:
	+ The lean body mass that is desired aesthetically can lead to eating disorders and female athlete triad in dancers.
* Adequate Psychological health:
	+ Performance anxiety and psychosocial stressors of perfecting the art form of dance can potentially affect both students and professionals.
* Adequate Physique:
	+ Musculoskeletal injuries in dance most often occur due to the overuse of the body.
	+ Overuse injuries occur due to poor dance technique, inadequate strength, and inadequate flexibility
* Adequate Extrinsic Factors:
	+ Appropriate studio space, floors, footwear, and temperature can affect the physical health of dancers.
* Adequate Access to Health Care Providers:
	+ Dancers and teachers at all levels of training would need appropriate avenues to obtain medical care.

# Dance Educator’s Role

Dance teachers and educators are responsible for teaching dance technique. They must also become involved in injury prevention by looking at the dancer as a whole, not just as a vessel for choreography. Dance educators/teachers must:

1. Promote good nutritional practices.
2. Promote proper technique so that students work within their individual anatomical capabilities, rather than cheating to achieve a certain aesthetic (i.e. 180 degrees of turnout).
3. Recognize psychological problems.
4. Ensure use of proper dance space, floors and footwear, studio temperature.
5. Establish a referral base to send dancers when medical and psychological problems are identified.

# Guidelines for Dance Teachers

The following guidelines are recommended to help the teacher encourage the dance student to develop healthy practices in the skills of dance.

1. Provide proper floor and dance space for all classes at all levels. Sprung or floating floors, appropriate surfacing to prevent slipping, 100 square feet of unobstructed space per dancer, 15 ft ceiling height, mirrors, barres, acoustical balance, appropriate lighting and ventilation are recommended.
2. Arrange classes/rehearsals to teach students how to properly warm-up and cool down and allow adequate breaks for physical recovery. Part of the warm-up should include aerobic movement, which will help warm-up the muscles prior to dance movement. Prolonged stretches >30 sec after class should be done for all muscles. Ice can be placed on sore areas for at least 15 – 20 minutes. Alternatively, for muscles a 5 min ice massage can be used.
3. Proper footwear may help prevent injuries. The jazz sneaker provides more cushioning for jump landings and may help prevent shin splints. Socks should not been worn for fear of slipping. Pointe shoes should fit the size, width, and flexibility of the foot.
4. Injury management. Muscle soreness that goes away after 10 minutes is likely benign. Pain lasting longer may be indicative of an injury. Sharp pain or persistent pain may indicate a serious injury and may warrant rest and medical attention or referral to a performing arts medicine specialist.
5. Promote proper nutrition and eating habits (i.e. 1500 mg calcium with 1000 U Vit. D). Avoid excessive focus on body habitus.
6. Advise proper ballet technique by avoiding the following: pronation of feet, forcing turn-out, keeping heels on the floor in plié, gripping the floor with the toes, hyperextension of the back (sway back), tucking the pelvis under.
7. Educate students to avoid recreational activities that may cause additional stress to the body.
8. Recognize when psychological counseling for stress management is needed and establish a good referral source within the community. Also, teach psychological techniques such as imagery to enhance performance.
9. Require high quality of teaching and dance educational materials for students to learn from in the different fields of dance.
10. Develop a referral base and database of information on dancer’s physical, nutritional, and psychological health.
11. Students often initially seek the teacher’s advice on many health related issues, including injuries. Teachers should advise students that resources are available through performing arts medicine specialists.

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