

Training the Athlete

-the top 5 mistakes in the workout of a dancer

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We all know that in order to maintain a healthy body some form of exercise must be a part of your lifestyle. A balanced diet, adequate rest, and exercise are the key components for reaching and maintaining optimum health. Dancers are athletes that make very specific demands of their bodies. It is therefore essential to remember that in order for them to get their body to perform optimally, they must simultaneously work on cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, muscle endurance, and flexibility. It is always recommended to consult with a doctor before beginning any exercise regime and to get a complete yearly physical.

There are important guidelines that should be followed when working out. Make time for a quick warm up (5-10 minutes) before lifting weights, drink 64 oz. of water daily, and some form of cardio should be done 3-5 times a week. Dancers, however, are unique and have extraordinary circumstances to consider. After consulting with Lisa Buchanan, who is a certified personal trainer and nutrition advisor at The Ranch Gym in Coppell, Texas, an interesting pattern surfaced. We discovered 5 mistakes dancers consistently make when working out.

#5 Failing to Warm Up Before and Stretch After Weight Training

A dancer should spend 10-20 minutes warming up prior to lifting. Walking on a treadmill or riding a stationary bike works well. It is imperative that after lifting weights, 10-20 minutes is spent stretching. The act of lifting causes the muscles to become shorter and tighter. This will cause a dancer to lose flexibility. Not only will your kicks and splits suffer, but the body is then more prone to dance injuries. To maintain a body that is strong, long and lean, always warm up before and stretch after lifting heavy weights.

#4 Using Dance As Cardio

I know using dance class to fulfill your cardio sounds like a good idea. Unfortunately, it is not the best choice. If you dance more than two times a week your body has become accustomed to this regime. In order to reap any cardiovascular benefits from dancing you would have to increase the intensity and duration on a regular basis. This is close to impossible to achieve because the performer rarely controls the rehearsal process. Better results would come from choosing another form of cardio like running, swimming or power walking. Also, don't get stuck in a rut. Vary the style of cardio often. This will keep the body guessing, and it will work harder for you.

#3 Not Eating Enough

When a dancer is trying to lose weight they often make a big mistake by decreasing the amount of food eaten. This causes the body to think that it is starving. Also, it slows down the metabolism so that the small amount of food that was taken in is held onto. To lose weight the healthy way, just the opposite needs to happen. Eating at least six small healthy meals a day will speed up your metabolism. Meals should be made up of mainly lean meats (not fried), fruits and vegetables. Allow sweets, carbonated beverages, fried foods and white bread in moderation only. By eating a larger amount of nutritious foods and drinking plenty of water, the dancer can stay fit without feeling deprived.

#2 Overdoing It

Dancers tend to push themselves too hard. Dancing and performing requires stamina, dedication, and most importantly, discipline. This makes for a wonderful dancer, but it shouldn't be carried over into the gym. It is crucial that you learn to listen and pay attention to your body. If at any time during a workout you get dizzy or nauseous you should slow down or stop and rest. Also, working out everyday is not recommended. The body needs time to recover and rest. Exercising 3-5 times a week or every other day is more than enough.

#1 Worshipping the Scale

Using the scale as a guideline is okay, but it is not a true picture of your health. Muscle weighs more than fat, so if you are lifting weights on a regular basis and eating right, you could actually gain weight according to the scale. Since muscle mass burns calories this is a good thing! At one point, Lisa (the personal trainer) weighed 145 lbs. and was a size 14. Today she weighs the same but is a size 6. The only way to measure your true level of health is to find out your muscle to fat ratio. You can get this measurement from your doctor or a certified trainer. Also, consider how your body looks and how your clothes fit rather than what the scale says.

Dancers are athletes. Dancing is a demanding sport that incorporates endurance, strength and flexibility. As athletes, it is important for dancers to follow a multifaceted workout regime in order to reach optimal performance levels and reduce the incidence of injuries. Developing a dance conditioning routine may seem like an inconvenience but it will be time well spent and essential for a winning season.

