

7 Reasons Why You Need Fitness as a Performer

1. You need dance fitness to be able to last longer on the dance floor.

Dancers don't focus on cardio until they are deep into rehearsals and performance – by then, it may be too late. Often dancers lack the stamina required for the performance (which might lead to injury). Unless an aerobic dance class is taken, an average dance technique class is too intermittent for any positive aerobic effect to occur.

Although technique classes can be modified to involve some degree of aerobic work using simple, repetitive movements, unless the dancer is extremely unfit at the start, there is little change in a dancer's aerobic capacity only by dancing alone.

To improve cardiovascular fitness, 20-45 minutes of aerobic exercise, 3-7 times a week is recommended. The dancers should workout more in the off - season than in the peak of performance season to avoid overtraining and injury. Dance instructors should encourage students in other activities like walking, jogging, cycling, stair climbing, or swimming outside of class.

2. You need dance fitness to pack a punch in your performance

Every trainee, as well as all trainers, wants to go "all- out" when it comes to performance. Dancing your heart out is possible only if you are trained for short bursts of high-intensity interval training.

The technical training may or may not train for these short bursts of energy demanding moves, and dancers may risk injuries due to fatigue if they go in unprepared. Anaerobic movements are not going to replace the traditional dance methods, but they do add functional support for the physiological needs of today's dancer, who has to be as much an athlete as an artist. For anaerobic fitness is associated with high intensity, maximal, short bursts of activity and a dancer can opt for sprint training, interval training, ply metrics, and dance-specific repetitive movement phases with faster, more dynamic movements for increasing the power to their performances.

3. You need dance fitness for muscular endurance

There are concerns in the dancing fraternity that too much muscle strength will negatively affect the aesthetic appearance of a dancer as well as his/her flexibility. Nothing can be farther from the truth though. Endurance training leads to reduced occurrences of dance injuries, and also leads to better dancing without interfering with the artistic or aesthetic demands of the dance.

Strength/endurance training helps to improve the muscles' ability to produce a continuous movement without overtiring.

Strength training may involve heavy, or light weights or resistance training with repetition stretched over time. Each strength training program can be aimed at a specific goal. Depending on the intensity (low/ high) resistance (heavy/ light) and frequency of repetition, workouts interspersed with recovery periods of different duration helps in improving the muscle strength.

Some common exercises for strength /endurance training are static (held) exercises with some resistance, partnered assisted activities with some resistance, Pilates, and yoga.

4. You need dance fitness for better flexibility

Flexibility is an essential element for dancers.

It compliments muscular strength, builds efficiency in movement, coordination and prevents injuries. A dancer benefits the most by incorporating different methods of stretching – static (holding), dynamic (moving through the stretch_ and proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF- alternate contraction and relaxation) in the workout routine.

You have to be careful with the way you stretch. The muscle being focussed on needs to be carefully isolated and breathing correctly is equally important. With regular flexibility workouts, muscle fibers become more pliable to the new length.

5. Fitness helps in improving neuromuscular coordination while dancing

Dance fitness also involves balance, coordination, agility, and skill. Though this aspect of fitness is addressed quite often in most dance technique classes, having a separate fitness plan focussing on neuromuscular coordination help in improving control and application of the right muscles at the right time.

Most dance forms expect dancers to develop efficiency in movements, so the positions look effortless and not forced.

Through imagery, visualization, a dancer can improve neural pathways, so the movements are voluntary and instinctive, and don't feel memorized and tutored. Motor learning and motor control is an essential element of fitness routines for professional dancers around the world, irrespective of the type of dance.

Meditation, deep breathing, progressive relaxation exercises, somatic techniques like (Tai chi, Pilates, yoga) are very helpful in improving neuromuscular coordination.

6. Your fitness level can affect your body fat and muscle composition

Body image issues plague most dancers from time to time. Two dancers have the same height, weight and overall fitness levels may still differ when it comes to the body fat percentage.

Healthy lean muscle mass to fat mass ratio is a critical indicator of a dancer's future physical performance. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), healthy body compositions range from 17 to 25% of body fat and below 15% for males. Worried about fat? Don't be, because a certain amount of fat is essential for daily healthy functioning of your body.

Dancers, who wish to jump higher, turn faster, and survive extended, tiring training and rehearsal sessions and still perform at their peak on the D-day, need to have an optimal body composition which is unique to them.

Appropriate energy intake in the form of nutritious diet and consumption of calories in the way of correct fitness routine helps dancers achieve the right body composition.

7. Rest is also a part of your dance fitness!

- Do you feel you have rested enough when you wake up?
- Are you fully charged or feel like hitting the snooze button every morning?
- How often do you feel burned out and tired?

Your fitness levels also determine your ability to recover faster from the grueling, physically and mentally exhausting routine that you follow in pursuit of dancing excellence.

Rest is vital to accelerate muscle regeneration, recovery and decrease fatigue that might cause injuries.

Overtraining negatively affects a dancer's performance.

To reverse the effects of overtraining, diet, hydration, proper rest and a night of restful sleep is required.

Years ago, it was said that best dancers have two talents that set them ahead of their contemporaries- deep understanding of expressions, and physical and psychological prowess to accomplish it to perfection. A dancer who can jump higher, balance longer is not necessarily a better dancer, unless they are fit to be consistent in the long run.

A fitter dancer is always a better performer.