

Dancing to your Full Potential?

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Online Courses for Dancers, Teachers and Parents

Endorsed by British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine

<https://www.sportreadyacademy.com/p/training-as-a-high-performing-female-dancer-team>

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TRAINING AS A HIGH-PERFORMING FEMALE DANCER
Discover strategies to stay healthy and perform at your best.

Dancer  Team 

Dance is a performance art form that is both athletically and mentally demanding. The success of young female dancers depends on their ability to manage these demands as their bodies develop. Dance-specific online courses for performers, teachers and parents can help young female dancers prepare for a rewarding future.

As a medical doctor, who is passionate about dance, I have created these courses to provide young female dancers with the latest professional-level training and medical performance strategies. The aim is for every dancer to achieve her personal best in a healthy and sustainable fashion.

Why do dancers need these courses?

These photographs show how the demands of dance have changed over two generations. On the left is my grandmother in her early 20s, during the 1920s. To the right is her granddaughter at about the same age in the 1980s. My grandmother is wearing a loose-fitting ballet costume and has a soft, romantic posture. Although she is en pointe, she has two feet on the ground. In contrast, 60 years later, I am wearing a tighter fitting, shorter tutu and I am balancing on one leg, en pointe, in a more athletic pose. This not to say that one style of dance is better than another or that I am a better dancer than my grandmother at the same age.

Looking over my grandmother's ballet books, the ballet steps have remained the same. I can understand and dance the enchainment (collection of steps) that she wrote down back in the 1920s. What has changed is how these steps are performed. Dancers now need to be more athletic, requiring greater physical demands. These physical demands require more intense training, balanced by attention to nutritional intake.



Similar changes have occurred in sport. Athletes take on heavier training loads, becoming “citius, altius, fortius”. The downside is that increased training, especially in younger age groups, has seen the emergence and recognition of relative energy deficiency on sport (RED-S)¹. The female athlete triad was described in 1980s, where female athletes with insufficient energy intake to match training demands fell into a state of low energy availability, resulting in negative effects on menstrual function and bone health. In 2014, the International Olympic Committee published a consensus statement on RED-S. This broadened the spectrum beyond the female athlete triad, pointing out that the adverse consequences of low energy availability were not limited to female athletes, periods and bones. Low energy availability has negative consequences across a range aspect of mental and physical health. RED-S can affect men and women, across all levels of activity. Crucially, RED-S, unlike the female athlete triad, highlights the negative effects on performance.

How is this relevant to dancers?

Although the IOC mentions aesthetic sports in its description of RED-S, there is, nevertheless, a distinction between sport and dance at the organisational and cultural level. Evidence of relative energy deficiency in dance comes from a study we conducted in dancers worldwide². Younger dancers are particularly susceptible, because the energy demand of dance training comes in addition to the concurrent high energy demands of growth and development. Puberty and adolescence can be challenging times of physical and psychological change. The demands of dance training can create a difficult balance of biopsychosocial factors³.

Dancing provides joy and supports mental and physical health. These courses provide knowledge and understanding to help navigate this tricky period in a young dancer’s life, in order to reap to the wealth of benefits offered by dance.

What's covered in the online dancer courses?

These courses are endorsed by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine⁴. They provide dancers, teachers and parents with the latest professional-level training and medical performance strategies on how young female dancers can reach their full potential in dance.

The starting point is to explore the meaning of health and the fundamental physiology relevant to young female dancers. Discussion moves on to how to support optimal health for dance through nutrition, recovery and type of training, providing dancers with practical, actionable strategies. Top tips highlight what to watch out for to indicate that things are going well, as well as early warning signs that things might be out of balance. The online course also has a quiz and links to further resources. You can select a course for a group of dancers, teachers or parents or you can opt for an individual dancer course format.

References

¹ Keay N. 2018 UPDATE: Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S) *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bjsem/2018/05/30/2018-update-relative-energy-deficiency-in-sport-red-s/>

² Keay N, Overseas A, Francis G Indicators and correlates of low energy availability in male and female dancers *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* 2020;6:e000906. doi: 10.1136/bmjsem-2020-000906

³ Keay N. Energy Availability in Dancers – and lessons for all sports *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bjsem/2020/12/30/energy-availability-in-dancers/>

⁴ British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine www.health4performance.co.uk