

Ideas for staying in shape during social isolation restrictions

How do we best support our laid-off dancers during the COVID-19 pandemic?

With the onset of COVID-19 many dance companies have made the difficult decisions to cancel performances and in many cases lay off their dancers. Unlike a traditional summer layoff, COVID-19 has presented new challenges as dancers have no studio space to use nor options for full classes to take which would allow them to maintain a level of dance specific conditioning. Artistic directors and dancers alike all recognize that this is not like a normal layoff, there are no opportunities for guestings, classes, or the ability to maintain physical fitness.

However, it is a time to allow chronic issues to heal and to give some attention to muscle imbalances and foundational issues focusing on injury prevention. This paper will discuss the steps dancers can take to maintain their health and wellness along with appropriate return to work guidelines. We hope these tips and recommendations will help ease the dancers return once dance companies decide it is safe to re-open their doors.

Maintaining Baseline Conditioning at home

While dancers are not under contract, it is important for them to maintain a baseline level of fitness to allow for a smooth transition back to work. This is highly recommended for mental health and for physical conditioning. Dancers should continue modified class 3-5 days per week, and complete some form of cross conditioning at least 3 days a week. It is optimal that during the off time a dancer maintains approximately 2-3 hours a day of movement.

There are many online options for dance classes at this time, but it is ideal to maintain the company community and offer a virtual company class if possible.

Cross conditioning

is important during this time as it creates balance within the dancer's body, it can assist in improving cardiovascular endurance, as well as injury prevention for the upcoming season. It can include but is not limited to:

- Single leg calf raises
 - Work up to 35 single leg ELEVES in parallel each leg every day during an “off season” (this means there is no plie break in the releve)

- Australia Ballet in unpublished research has shown that 35 elevelles in the off season and a minimum of 24 single leg elevelles during the season reduced calf strain and lower leg issues by 70%.
- Floor based exercises
 - Pilates
 - Gyrokinesis™
 - Yoga
 - Floor barre
 - Multiple online resources available on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook along with practice websites
- At home weight training
 - Can utilize household items for weights (examples):
 - Water jugs
 - Books in a backpack
- Cardio - low impact options are suggested
 - Should be completed for ~30-45 continuous minutes
 - Walking
 - Stairs (avoid touching handrails)/step
 - Home pool workouts (if you have access)
 - Running or laps
 - Stationary bike (if you have access)
 - Jump rope
 - Make sure you have good sneakers to start any impact (non sprung floors)
- Cardio circuit
 - Includes exercises that target upper body, lower body, fully body integration, in place cardio activity or plyometrics
 - Cycles between on and off
 - Tabata- 20 seconds on/ 10 seconds off complete 8 rounds (2:1 ratio)
 - HIIT- 30 seconds on/ 30 seconds off (1:1 ratio), 1 minute on/2 minutes off (1:2 ratio)
 - Free- any mixture of on off ratio 2 min on/1 min off (2:1 ratio)
- Plyometric training
 - Traditional
 - Jumps in place
 - Box jumps
 - Dance Specific
 - Utilizes plyometric principles but dance specific jumps (saute, changement, etc.)
- Running
 - If you are new to running or have never done a run progression before it is recommended that you use a walk to run progression to acclimate your body to the impact and loading that running requires.
 - Programs such as “Couch to 5K” are a good place to start

- Make sure that you have good running shoes and do not use sneakers that have lost cushioning.

All conditioning recommendations are meant as a guideline. Please listen to your body, if something does not feel right please stop and contact the appropriate medical provider. Now is not the time to create new injuries.

Sample weekly schedule:

Day 1: Ballet barre + cardio cross training

Day 2: Pilates or floor barre + barre and some center work

Day 3: Plyometrics + weight training exercises

Day 4: Ballet barre + cardio cross training

Day 5: Pilates or floor barre + barre and comes center work

Day 6: Optional rest day or Plyometrics + weight training exercises

Day 7: Rest day

Appropriate Return to Work Guidelines

Without the use of a dance studio and being confined to a house, it is nearly impossible for a dancer to stay rehearsal and performance-ready at a professional level. While the US is still in the middle of this COVID-19 pandemic it is recommended that a professional dancer, who is accustomed to dancing/rehearsing 6-8 hours a day, complete 2-3 hours of movement daily (3-5 days a week). This can be divided between traditional dance styles and cross conditioning.

Once the dancers have received a return to work date, they should plan a 2-3 week ramp-up period that brings their total amount of time working up to 4-6 hours per day, 5 day days per week. When cleared to return to the studios, they should be given another 2-3 weeks to build up to a 6-8 hour work load at full capacity.

There are many things that should be taken into account in allowing the dancers a proper amount of time to ramp back up. After 8 weeks of detraining, research has shown that elite athletes require 12 weeks of re-training to return to baseline level of fitness. The progression presented above is shorter due to the assumption that the dancer has been able to maintain a baseline level of conditioning. In the two week at home ramp up, the dancer can begin to adapt their body to stress through dance specific plyometric programs completed in sneakers if a sprung floor is not available, dynamic stretching, increasing cardio and dance specific conditioning. Once cleared to return to the studios dancers will need approximately 2 weeks to return to full grand allegro jumps, overhead lifting and full 6-8 hour rehearsal days. By allowing this time for the dancer's body to acclimate to the stresses of professional dance, the companies will decrease the risk of stress injuries such as bone fractures, as well as prevent sudden overuse injuries such as tendonitis, tendon tears or acute sprains and strain. Please note that the time periods involved in gradually returning back to professional dance training may vary depending on the dancers' ability to have maintained dance-specific training, physical fitness, and strength.

How to Integrate Dance Medicine Staff into Dance Return

The information presented above are general guidelines for an individual professional dancer, companies should work closely under the guidance of their dance medicine staff who understand the specific needs of their company. This information is not meant to replace the professional knowledge and guidance of those who care for and treat the company on a regular basis. During this time the dance medicine staff can stay connected to their dancers by conducting conditioning classes offered through virtual platforms, providing virtual consults for ongoing musculoskeletal complaints, and reinforcing an appropriate return to dance progression.

Wellness Tips

For general health it is recommended that dancers continue to get 8-9 hours of sleep per night. If a dancer is under increased stress or feeling sick they may require more sleep. While at home it is also important to stay hydrated. Dancers may want to write out a daily schedule (see below) to help them stick to a return to dance progression and use virtual platforms such as zoom or FaceTime to connect with their peers for accountability.

Staying Motivated

Maintaining motivation can be challenging when the future is unclear, many dancers and companies do not know when they will be able to return to the studio. Dancers can take small steps to maintain motivation by setting small goals and breaking them down into smaller steps. Work on visualizing being back in the studio doing the work that you love. Take a class from someone who inspires you or will offer you a motivational challenge. Organize a space that is designated for class and exercise. Play music that gets you moving. Try not to worry about what you can not control. Be consistent. Find the things that bring you joy and know that it is ok to take a day off. When nothing else works, dance like no one is watching! There is some freedom to this situation.

Disclaimer: The information on staying safe during COVID-19 contained in this paper is intended to help guide and inform the dancer. It is not meant to take the place of the advice of a medical professional.

This information is provided by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health.

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