

DANCING WITH INJURIES: SELF CARE FOR DANCERS

By Jack R. Giangiuilio, D.C., B.S.

After I treat a dancer for her or his injury, their first question is, "Doc, can I still dance?" My answer is usually, "Yes, but I have conditions."

I allow the dancer to dance unless the nature of the injury will cause permanent damage to the dancer or affect the dancer's ability to perform. Keep in mind that just because you're able to dance with pain, doesn't mean your performance looks good to the audience.

So what are the conditions? You must perform *Pre-Dance Warm-Up* and *Post-Dance Cool-Down*; otherwise, NO DANCEY, DANCEY.

Pre-Dance Warm-Up is a must before all dance classes and performances. I do not mean dance class warm-up, that's a workout! I mean, to lightly jog in place or around the studio for 6 minutes. Anything to get the blood moving! After which you should stretch your injured areas. Now it's time for dance class warm-up and finally dance class or the performance. Anytime your body cools all the way down, you need to repeat the *Pre-Dance Warm-Up* before dancing again.

Now for the *Post-Dance Cool-Down*. When dance class or the performance is over, it is important to **immediately** ice your injured areas for **10-20 minutes**. This will reduce the pain and inflammation created by dancing with an injury. When you ice and how long you ice, are very important factors. Less than 10 minutes is not enough time to obtain the desired physiological affects, where as more than 20 minutes may actually produce the opposite physiological effects. The word **immediately** is the key; the longer you wait to ice the more time there is for inflammation to build and the more pain you will experience.

"But what if I have to dance again?" If you ice, you must warm-up again before dancing. This is where it gets tricky. We all know that you usually have more than one dance class per day, and that you may have breaks between parts and during performances. In these cases you must have at least a 20 minute break in order to ice. Since you will ice for the minimum time period of 10 minutes and then do the *Pre-Dance Warm-Up* for at least 10 minutes (6 minutes jogging plus 4 minutes for stretches).

"But I don't have that long of a break!" Don't worry. If your break is less than 20 minutes, DO NOT ICE. Instead of icing keep your injured areas moving. This will keep the blood flowing and the inflammation from building up at your injury sites. So don't nap; keep moving! Once you have enough time, then ice.

Remember, ice is your friend. It is the best tool for decreasing inflammation and pain, as well as, keeping you dancing.

-Dance Long and Healthy

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