

## **FOOT CONTROL IS YOUR FOUNDATION**

by Jack R. Giangiulio, D.C., B.S.

Proper foot control is the most important factor for dancers to be able to maintain their lines and to perform their techniques. You may ask, "What constitutes proper foot control?" The ability to hold your talus bones in neutral positions, otherwise known as, the *subtalar neutral position*. Huh! Doc, can you put that in dancer terms.

The subtalar neutral position is when you can stand without your feet rolling-in (hyperpronation) or rolling-out (hypersupination). When your feet are rolled-in, your arches drop towards the floor shifting all your body weight onto the inside of your feet. When your feet are rolled-out, your arches lift too high shifting your body weight to the outside of your feet. How can I tell if I'm rolling?

When you stand, your arches should be about two finger widths from the floor. So have a friend place two fingers under your arches. If your friend's fingers cannot fit under your arches, you are rolled-in. If more than two fingers fit under your arches, you are rolled-out. Since you may not roll your feet in every ballet position or with all techniques, try this test in different positions or while holding different techniques. If you find that you have a problem with rolling, it's time to go back to the basics and relearn your ballet positions. Practice maintaining each basic position for 1-2 minutes while concentrating on holding your feet in the subtalar neutral positions (make sure that your hips performing correct turn-out and you are not forcing turn-out from the knees and ankles). Once you are able to do this, it's time to do the same thing with your techniques. This body re-education process may take from 3-4 weeks, practicing every day.

After the body re-education process, you may find that your chronic foot and ankle pains will disappear and your dancing will improve. For example, after I lectured at a local college, a dancer asked me about a problem she was having with her *arabesque*. For some reason her left side could lift much higher and easier than her right side. So I had her hold a right *arabesque*. Immediately I zoomed in on her left foot and saw that it was rolling-in. I then had her repeat the *arabesque*; however, this time I held her left foot in the subtalar neutral position. To her and the class's amazement, the dancer's *arabesque* was now effortless and excelled in height.

Without proper control of your feet in the subtalar neutral position, not only do you compromise technique and line, you also place your body at risk to injury. Rolling-in is one of the most common causes of foot, knee, hip, and low back injuries in dancers. When the feet roll-in, or out, the alignment of the hips and knees must change in order to compensate for the rolling. In turn, the low back must also change for these compensations. This places extra stress on the feet, knees, hips, low back and all of the supporting musculatures. The joint that compensates the most is at the highest risk of injury because it is under the most stress; in the case of dancers it is usually the knee joint. As a matter of fact this co-insides with a five year study of ballet dancers' injuries conducted by Dr. James Garrick. After reviewing the reported dancers' injuries, he found that knee injuries were the most common, closely followed by feet, ankles, legs, hips, spine and upper extremities, respectively.

So remember foot control is the foundation of all dance technique. Check the position of your feet and practice maintaining control of the subtalar neutral position. You will find that you will have less aches and pains, nicer lines and better technique.

*Dance Long and Healthy*

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