



Guidelines on Pointe Readiness

What words come to mind when you think of a ballerina: light, airy, beautiful, effortless? There is little doubt that pointe shoes have added to this image of a ballerina. Yet as most dancers know, dancing en pointe is not an easy task. It takes years of strengthening and training to feel comfortable dancing in a pointe shoe. This paper is to be used as a resource to assure students are ready for this right of passage in the ballet world.

Dancing en pointe requires great strength in the foot and ankle. To achieve the extra range of motion from demi pointe to full pointe, there is increased demand on muscles, tendons and ligaments and more stability is needed. Not only do the foot and ankle need to be strong in order to dance en pointe, the hip and core muscles must also be strong and stable. Dancers need stability of hip and core musculature so as not to put extra pressure on their foot and ankle joints, which can lead to injury. Without proper strength and technique, dancing en pointe could be damaging to a child's growth plates, tendons, ligaments and muscles. Common injuries associated with dancing en pointe include: ankle sprains, muscle strains and joint pain from the extreme ranges of motion. These injuries can be caused by weaknesses in musculature, poor technique (including winging or sickling of feet while en pointe) and ill-fitting pointe shoes. Properly fitting shoes help to decrease the stress on the foot while en pointe. Getting fitted by a trained professional or teacher is the best way to ensure a well-fitting pointe shoe.

Medical professionals who specialize in treating dancers have done much research on when it is best for students to attempt their first pair of pointe shoes. This list includes proper training and adequate range of motion in the ankle and overall strength so the student has control of his or her body. Here are the most common recommended criteria:

- o At least 3-4 years of ballet training



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- o Minimum age of 10-12
- o Good arch of foot when pointed (approximately 90 degrees of plantarflexion)
- o Good strength of feet, ankles, legs, hips
- o Technique that shows alignment of “knees over toes” during plies in any position, including jumps
- o Ability to balance for one minute on a single leg, flat foot and eyes closed

Many students look forward with anticipation to getting their first pair of pointe shoes. It is important to make sure the student is appropriately ready for this new level of skill and artistry. We must protect students to ensure that they have a fulfilling experience and are always renewing their love of dance. Dancers realize that it takes strong intention, hard work and dedication to dance safely en pointe. As Gaynor Minden states, *“It’s amazing what goes into making something effortless.”*

This resource paper was written by Anna Porter PT, DPT under the auspices of Minnesota Dance Medicine Foundation

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