



Pointe Practicalities

Tips for adult ballet students

Your essential
guide to fitting,
preparing, and
caring for your
pointe shoes
and your body.



by Jo McDonald



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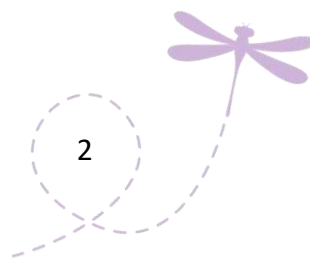
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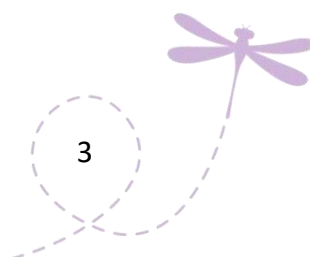
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Congratulations!

Congratulations on reaching this significant milestone in your ballet journey! As an adult dancer, completing your pre-pointe training and passing your readiness for pointe assessment is a significant achievement. You are now ready to embark on the next phase: getting your first pair of pointe shoes.

This guide is designed to provide you with comprehensive information and support as you take this important step.

Dancing *en pointe* requires dedication, preparation, and the right equipment. This guide covers everything you need to know to ensure a smooth transition to pointe work. It includes details on how to get properly fitted for your pointe shoes, helping you find the best pair for your feet. You'll also learn about essential pointe shoe accessories that can enhance your comfort and performance. Finding the right dancewear suppliers is crucial, so I've included a list of nearby suppliers where you can purchase your pointe shoes and accessories.

Understanding the unique needs of your feet is key to pointe work, so I've outlined different types of dancer's feet and provided pointe shoe considerations for each type. I've shared tips to guide you through the process of preparing your pointe shoes, from sewing ribbons and elastics to stretching the shank and attaching suede tips. Proper care can extend the life of your shoes, so we'll offer tips on maintaining your pointe shoes in optimal condition.

Foot care is paramount to prevent injuries and ensure longevity in your dancing journey. This guide will provide you with essential foot care tips and a list of useful items to have with you when dancing *en pointe*. Additionally, professional support is vital in this journey; so I've included tips on what to look for in a physiotherapist and podiatrist and provided a list of recommended professionals.

By following these guidelines, you'll be well-prepared to enjoy a safe and rewarding experience dancing *en pointe*. Welcome to this exciting new chapter in your dance journey!



Jo McDonald
Founder of Dragonfly Dance



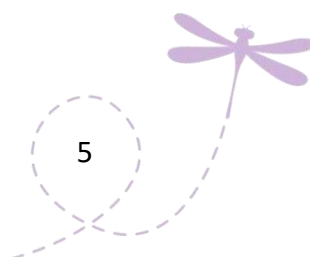
What to expect for your fitting

Getting your first pair of pointe shoes is an exciting milestone in your ballet journey! To ensure you receive the best possible service, it's important to make an appointment with a professional fitter who specialises in pointe shoes. Make sure you do make an appointment and don't just turn up. A pointe shoe fitting can take time, and the shop may only have one person there, so they may be unable to dedicate the time to fit your shoes properly if not prepared.

During your fitting, which can take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour, expect a thorough and personalised experience to ensure the perfect fit. A skilled fitter will measure your feet and assess their shape, arch, and flexibility to select the ideal shoe for your unique needs. You'll try on several pairs, experimenting with different brands, sizes, and models.

The fitter will observe you *en pointe*, checking for proper alignment, support, and comfort. Be prepared to spend some time finding the best pair, as this attention to detail is crucial for your safety and success on pointe.

Remember, a well-fitted shoe will enhance your performance and help prevent injury, so take your time and enjoy this special process.



Anatomy of a Pointe Shoe

Understanding the different parts of a pointe shoe is essential for ensuring a proper fit, making adjustments, and taking care of your shoes.

By understanding the different parts of a pointe shoe, you can make more informed decisions about fitting, customizing, and caring for your shoes. Each component plays a vital role in providing the support, flexibility, and comfort necessary for dancing *en pointe*.

Here's a detailed look at the anatomy of a pointe shoe:

Box

- Description: The box is the stiff, front part of the pointe shoe that encases and supports the dancer's toes.
- Function: It provides the necessary support for the dancer to stand *en pointe*. It is typically made from layers of fabric and glue, molded into a hard shell.
- Components:
 - Platform: The flat surface at the tip of the box where the dancer balances when *en pointe*.
 - Vamp: The part of the box that covers the top of the toes, varying in length and shape to suit different foot types. The vamp covers the top of the toes and part of the foot. Its length and shape can affect the fit and support of the shoe.

Shank

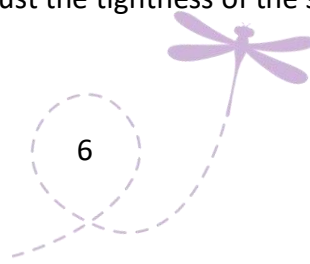
- Description: The shank is a piece of material (often leather, plastic, or cardboard) that runs along the bottom of the shoe from the heel to the arch.
- Function: It provides support to the arch of the foot when the dancer is *en pointe*. The stiffness and length of the shank can vary, affecting the level of support and flexibility.
- Types: Full shank, three-quarter shank, and half shank, split sole, each offering different levels of support and flexibility.

Sole

- Description: The sole is the outer bottom part of the pointe shoe, typically made of leather.
- Function: It provides traction and durability. The sole is usually sewn or glued to the shoe and helps in maintaining the shoe's shape and providing stability.

Drawstring

- Description: A cord that runs around the edge of the shoe's upper opening.
- Function: It allows the dancer to adjust the tightness of the shoe around the foot for a more secure and customized fit.



Ribbons

- Description: Long strips of satin or other sturdy fabric that are sewn onto the sides of the shoe.
- Function: Ribbons are tied around the ankle to secure the shoe to the foot, providing support and preventing the shoe from slipping off.

Elastics

- Description: Strips of elastic fabric that can be sewn onto the shoe.
- Function: Elastics provide additional support and help keep the shoe snug against the foot. They can be sewn across the arch or around the ankle.

Quarter

- Description: The back portion of the shoe that covers the heel.
- Function: The quarter helps to secure the heel in place and provides additional support and stability.

Throat

- Description: The opening of the shoe where the foot is inserted.
- Function: The shape and size of the throat can affect how the shoe fits around the foot and ankle.

Wings

- Description: The sides of the box that extend up from the platform towards the heel.
- Function: The wings provide lateral support to the foot, helping to keep the foot aligned and stable within the shoe.



Different types of dancer's feet and pointe shoe considerations

Dancers have a variety of foot shapes and attributes that can affect their performance *en pointe*. Understanding these differences is crucial for selecting the right pointe shoes and addressing specific challenges and benefits.

General Considerations

- **Strength and Conditioning:** Regardless of foot type, all dancers need strong intrinsic foot muscles, calves, and ankles to support their work *en pointe*.
- **Proper Fitting:** A professional fitting for pointe shoes is essential to find the right balance of comfort, support, and aesthetics for each foot type.
- **Preventative Care:** Regular stretching, strengthening exercises, and proper care can mitigate many of the problems associated with different foot shapes.

Arches

High Arches (Giselle feet)

Strengths:

- High arches often provide a strong and aesthetically pleasing line on pointe, enhancing the overall appearance of the foot.
- High arches are often considered beautiful and desirable in ballet due to their elegant line.
- **Flexibility:** They provide a strong push-off for jumps and a pleasing curve when *en pointe*.

Challenges:

- Dancers with high arches may struggle with stability and are at a higher risk for ankle injuries due to the extreme curve of their feet.
- **Strength Requirement:** Dancers with high arches need strong intrinsic foot muscles to support their arches and prevent injuries.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- Shoes need a strong shank to provide support, a medium to high vamp helps support the arch and prevent the foot from collapsing, and a shoe with a higher profile accommodates the curve of the arch.
- Dancers may also need customised padding to support the arch and prevent collapsing.

Low Arches (Flat Feet)

Strengths:

- Low arches can offer more natural stability and balance, which is beneficial for maintaining control *en pointe*.

Challenges:

- Achieving a proper pointe can be difficult, and there may be increased strain on the tendons and ligaments.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- Shoes with flexible shanks (or split sole) allows for easier articulation
- A lower vamp can help achieve a better pointe position
- Padding can support the foot and prevent discomfort

Toes

Long Toes

Strengths:

- Long toes can create a beautiful line and help distribute weight evenly across the foot.

Challenges:

- There is a higher risk of toe injuries, such as blisters and bruising, due to the increased pressure on the toes.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- A tapered box can accommodate the length of the toes
- A longer vamp provides necessary support and protection
- Gel pads can reduce pressure on the toes
- Toe spacers may prevent overlapping and friction.

Short Toes

Strengths:

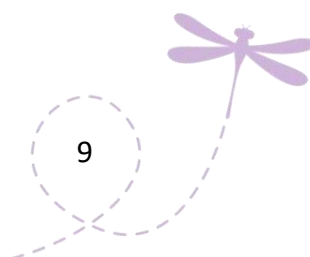
- Short toes can offer a more compact and sturdy base for balancing *en pointe*.

Challenges:

- Achieving a full pointe may be more difficult, and there may be added pressure on the metatarsals.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- a broad, square box can help distribute pressure evening
- a shorter vamp prevents excessive pressure on the toes
- extra padding can provide additional comfort and proection.



Grecian Feet (Second Toe Longer than Big Toe)

Strengths:

- Leverage: The longer second toe can provide additional leverage for pushing off the floor.

Problems:

- Pressure Points: The longer second toe may bear more weight *en pointe*, leading to discomfort or blisters.

Pointe shoe considerations

- A tapered box can better fit the shoe shape
- Extra padding for the second toe to prevent discomfort
- A medium vamp provides a good balance of support

Peasant Feet (All Toes of Similar Length)

Strengths:

- Balance: Evenly distributed toes can provide a stable platform *en pointe*, making balance easier to achieve.
- Comfort: A broader, more even toe alignment can make it easier to find comfortable pointe shoes.

Problems:

- Aesthetic: The line may not be as traditionally desired, requiring more work to achieve a refined pointe shape.
- Flexibility: These feet might lack the arch flexibility often prized in ballet, necessitating extra stretching and strengthening.

Pointe shoe considerations

- A square box can evenly distribute pressure across all toes
- Even padding to prevent blisters and discomfort
- A medium profile suits the overall shape

Egyptian Feet (Big Toe Longest, Toes Taper Down)

Strengths:

- Ease of Fitting: This common foot shape often fits well into many pointe shoe brands.
- Natural Alignment: The tapered shape can align naturally within the pointe shoe.

Problems:

- Pressure on Big Toe: The big toe can take on more pressure, increasing the risk of toenail bruising or bunions.
- Instability: If the arch is not strong enough, the foot may struggle with stability *en pointe*.

Pointe shoe considerations

- A tapered box to accommodate the toe shape
- A medium to long vamp to support the big toe
- Adequate padding around the big toe

Square Feet (Toes are of Almost Equal Length)

Strengths:

- Stability: The square shape provides a solid, stable base *en pointe*.
- Even Distribution: Weight is evenly distributed across all toes, reducing pressure points.

Problems:

- Toe Box Fit: It can be challenging to find pointe shoes with a wide enough toe box to accommodate the shape without pinching.
- Potential Gaps: Shoes that are not a perfect fit may leave gaps, causing friction and blisters.

Pointe shoe considerations

- A square box provides even pressure distribution
- Use padding to prevent blisters and ensure comfort
- A medium profile fits the overall foot shape well

Foot width

Wide Feet

Strengths:

- Wide feet can provide a stable base and better weight distribution *en pointe*.

Challenges:

- Finding pointe shoes that fit properly can be challenging, as many standard shoes may be too narrow.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- A wide box and broader platform to accommodate the foot's width
- A higher profile can accommodate the foot width
- Custom fittings and possibly custom-made shoes are often the best solutions.

Narrow Feet

Strengths:

- Narrow feet can fit well into standard pointe shoes and often create a sleek line.

Challenges:

- There may be issues with the shoe feeling too loose, leading to a lack of support and potential injuries.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- A narrow box for a snug fit
- A lower profile fits the narrow shape better
- Dancers may need to use additional padding to prevent the foot from slipping inside the shoe.

Bunions

Strengths:

- Dancers with bunions need to manage this condition carefully to continue dancing comfortably.

Challenges:

- Bunions can cause significant pain and discomfort, and they can be exacerbated by the pressure of pointe shoes.

Pointe Shoe Considerations:

- A wider box to accommodate the bunion
- Use extra padding to protect the bunion area
- A medium vamp provides necessary support
- Dancers may also benefit from custom-made shoes and toe spacers to help maintain alignment.

Pointe shoe accessories

Along with your first pair of pointe shoes, there are several accessories you'll need to enhance your comfort and protect your feet.

Ribbons and elastics

Ribbons and elastics are essential for securing your shoes; they come in different widths and materials, with some pre-sewn options available for convenience.

- Ribbons can be satin or elasticised, and are attached to each side of the shoe, then wrapped around the ankle and tied on the inner side of the ankle.
- Elastics are not essential, but can help provide additional support and help keep the shoe on your foot. Elastics can be a single loop attached at the back of the shoe, or two separate strips attached at the back, then crossed over to attach on the sides (at the same position as your ribbons). You can purchase special elastic from a dancewear supplier.

Toe pads

Toe pads are a must-have, providing cushioning and reducing friction inside the shoes. They come in various materials, such as gel, foam, and fabric, so you can choose what feels best for you.

Sheep's wool can be used for cushioning in pointe shoes, which is wrapped around their toes or placed inside the toe box. Sheep's wool can be adjusted to provide the exact amount of padding needed, absorbs moisture to keep the feet dry and reduce risk of blisters and other skin irritations.

Toe pad orthotics, such as those created by En Pointe Orthotics, are a flexible, fully custom made silicone insert to be worn inside the pointe shoe. These are more expensive than other toe pads, but are designed specifically for your foot and are much more durable and long lasting.

Choosing the right type of toe pad depends on your personal comfort, the shape of your feet, and the specific needs of your dancing. It might take some experimentation to find the perfect match for you.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Gel, Foam, and Fabric Toe Pads

Type	Benefits	Drawbacks
Gel	<p>Cushioning: Gel toe pads offer excellent cushioning, providing a soft and protective barrier against friction and pressure.</p> <p>Durability: They tend to last longer than other types of toe pads, maintaining their shape and cushioning over time.</p> <p>Washable: Many gel toe pads are easy to clean, which helps maintain hygiene and prolongs their lifespan.</p>	<p>Bulkiness: They can be bulkier than other types, which might affect the fit of the pointe shoe.</p> <p>Weight: Gel pads can add a slight amount of weight to your shoes, which might be noticeable for some dancers.</p>
Foam	<p>Lightweight: Foam toe pads are very light, making them less noticeable when dancing.</p> <p>Thinness: They are generally thinner, allowing for a closer fit and more precise feel in the shoe.</p> <p>Affordability: Foam pads are usually more affordable than gel pads, making them a budget-friendly option.</p>	<p>Durability: Foam pads can compress and wear out more quickly, requiring more frequent replacement.</p> <p>Less Cushioning: They may not offer as much cushioning as gel pads, which might be a concern for dancers with sensitive feet.</p>
Fabric	<p>Breathability: Fabric toe pads are breathable, helping to keep your feet cooler and reducing moisture buildup.</p> <p>Flexibility: They provide a natural feel and flexibility, allowing for a closer connection with the shoe.</p> <p>Thinness: Like foam pads, fabric pads are thin, offering a snug fit and better shoe control.</p>	<p>Less Cushioning: Fabric pads often provide the least amount of cushioning, which might not be sufficient for some dancers.</p> <p>Durability: They can wear out faster, especially with heavy use, requiring more frequent replacement.</p>

Toe spaces

You might also want to consider toe spacers to help align your toes and prevent blisters, as well as toe tape or blister pads for added protection.

Toe spacers can be a valuable accessory for dancers who experience certain foot issues or toe alignments that can affect their comfort and performance in pointe shoes. Here are some specific situations where toe spacers might be beneficial.

In all cases, it's important to consult with a professional fitter or a medical professional to determine the best type of spacer and its correct placement to ensure it meets your specific needs and provides the necessary support and comfort.

Benefits of spacers for different foot issues

Issue	Description	Benefits of spaces
Bunion	A bunion is a bony bump that forms on the joint at the base of the big toe. It can cause the big toe to lean towards the second toe, leading to misalignment.	Help keep the big toe in proper alignment, reducing pressure and friction on the bunion and preventing further misalignment
Overlapping Toes	Some dancers have toes that overlap or are very close together, which can cause discomfort and blisters when dancing on pointe.	Creates a small gap between the toes, reducing friction and pressure, and helping to prevent blisters and other irritation.
Hammer Toes	A hammer toe is a deformity that causes a toe to bend or curl downward instead of pointing forward. This can lead to pain and discomfort in pointe shoes.	Helps realign the toes and provide additional support, reducing discomfort and improving overall toe alignment.
Morton's Neuroma	Morton's neuroma is a thickening of the tissue around one of the nerves leading to the toes, often causing sharp pain or a burning sensation.	Alleviate pressure on the affected nerve, reducing pain and discomfort.
General Alignment Issues	Some dancers may have naturally misaligned toes or experience discomfort due to the shape of their feet.	Improves overall toe alignment, ensuring a more even distribution of weight and reducing the risk of developing blisters or other foot issues.

Suede toe cap

A suede toe cap can help protect the satin of your shoes, and they offer added friction for secure grip. Suede toe caps can be used instead of darning the tips of your pointe shoes (which can be time consuming and requires skill). Suede toe caps can be glued on using fabric or craft glue (not super glue or hot glue gun).

Sewing kit

A small sewing kit is handy for any on-the-go adjustments.

Shoe bag

Don't forget a mesh bag for ventilation and easy transport of your pointe shoes.

Investing in these accessories will help ensure a more comfortable and enjoyable experience on pointe.

Dancewear suppliers

Fusion Dance Wear

296 Brighton Road, North Brighton
phone 8296 9292

The Stage Shop

55 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Mile End
phone 8231 9554
email hello@thestageshop.com.au
website www.thestageshop.com.au

Dance FX

Shop 2/227 Unley Road, Malvern
phone: 0434 468 665

Shop 4/650 North East Road, Holden Hill
phone: 8266 0666

Email: info@dancefx.com.au
Website: www.dancefx.com.au

Dance Zone

7/88 Glynburn Road, Hectorville
Phone: 8337 6737
Website: www.dancezoneaustralia.com

Razzle Dazzle Dancewear

Shop 1, 364 Main South Road, Morphett Vale
phone: 8326 9799
Website: www.razzledazzledancewear.com.au

Preparing Your Pointe Shoes

Proper preparation of your pointe shoes is essential for both performance and longevity. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you prepare your pointe shoes effectively:

Sewing Ribbons

Type of ribbons

- Ribbons can be traditional satin or elasticised.
- Satin ribbons may provide greater ankle support, which may be better for dancers who need more ankle stability, such as beginners, dancers with weak ankles, high arches, flat feet, or hypermobile joints, or those recovering from injury. However, they can create pressure points or restrict blood flow if tied too tight. They can also loosen through movement and reduce the support required.
- Elasticised ribbons stretch with the movement of the foot, providing greater comfort as the foot moves. They distribute pressure more evenly across the foot, and reduce the risk of pressure points. However, over time, elastic ribbons can lose their stretch and effectiveness.

Placement:

- Position: Ribbons should be sewn at an angle on the inside of the shoe, about one inch from the heel seam. This angle helps secure the shoe to your foot and provides better support.
- Measurement: Measure the length of the ribbon by wrapping it around your ankle and adding a few extra inches to ensure you have enough to tie securely. The ribbon attached to the inside of the foot (the arch side) should be longer as it has to wrap an extra half around the ankle (so you can tie them on the inside of the ankle)

Sewing Technique:

- Thread: Use a strong, thick thread, ideally one that matches the colour of your pointe shoes. Double the thread for extra strength.
- Needle: Use a sharp and strong needle that can easily penetrate the layers of fabric and leather.
- Stitches: Use a whip stitch or running stitch to secure the ribbons. Sew along the perimeter of the ribbon, making sure to catch both the fabric of the shoe and the lining. Avoid sewing through the drawstring casing, as this can interfere with adjusting the fit.

Safely sealing point shoe ribbons:

- Use sharp scissors to cut the ribbons to a length that leaves enough to tie in a neat double knot, but is short enough to be able to tuck in under the ribbon. Make sure the cut is clean and straight to ensure even sealing.

- Light a match or lighter, hold the end of the ribbon a few inches away from the flame and slowly move the ribbon closer until the heat starts to melt the edge. You do not need to touch the flame directly to the ribbon, the heat will be sufficient to seal it.

Options for Elastics

Width and Length:

- Width: Elastics come in various widths, typically ranging from 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch. Choose a width that provides sufficient support without being too bulky.
- Length: Measure the elastic by stretching it across your ankle or instep, allowing for some tension but not so tight that it cuts off circulation.

Placement:

- Single Loop: Sew one piece of elastic across the arch of your foot. Attach each end inside the shoe just below the drawstring casing.
- Crisscross: Sew two pieces of elastic in a crisscross pattern. Attach one end of each piece near the heel seam on opposite sides of the shoe, crossing them over the instep, and securing the other end near the drawstring casing.
- Stitching: Use the same whip stitch or running stitch method as for ribbons, ensuring the elastic is securely attached.

Attaching Suede Tips

- Purpose: Suede tips add durability and traction to the toe box.
- Materials: Use small pieces of suede and strong adhesive like contact cement or fabric glue.
- Method: Cut the suede to fit the tip of the box. Apply adhesive to both the shoe and the suede, allow it to become tacky, then press the suede firmly onto the box. Let it dry completely before use.

Neatness

Tying Ribbons

- Location: Ribbons should be tied on the inside of the ankle, not at the back or outside. This prevents the knot from causing discomfort and maintains a neat appearance.
- Technique: Tie the ribbons securely but not too tightly, as this can restrict blood flow. Use a double knot to ensure they stay in place during dancing.

Tucking Ribbons In

- Neatness: After tying the ribbons, tuck the ends neatly under the wrapped sections. This not only looks tidy but also prevents the ribbons from coming loose or getting caught.
- Comfort: Make sure the tucked ends do not create uncomfortable lumps inside the shoe or press against your skin.

Handling the Drawstring

- Cutting: If the drawstring is too long, trim it to an appropriate length. Leave enough length to adjust the fit if necessary, but not so much that it dangles out of the shoe.
- Tucking In: Tuck the ends of the drawstring into the shoe. This keeps the appearance neat and prevents the drawstring from coming undone or getting caught.

Breaking in your shoes

Breaking in pointe shoes is a critical process that helps ensure they mold to your feet and provide the necessary support and comfort. Here's a guide on how to break in your pointe shoes effectively and safely:

Avoid excessive or aggressive methods to break in your shoes, such as slamming them in doors or bending them too forcefully. Instead, gently work the shoes with your hands and wear them during practice to mold them to your feet naturally.

Properly sew ribbons and elastics to the shoes before starting the break-in process. This helps keep the shoes snug and supportive as they mold to your feet.

Wearing Around the House:

Purpose:

- Gradually mold the shoes to the shape of your feet.

Method:

- Wear your new pointe shoes around the house for short periods. Walk and flex your feet gently to allow the shoes to start conforming to your feet naturally.

Manual flexing

Purpose:

- Soften specific parts of the shoe without compromising its structure.

Method:

- Use your hands to gently bend the shank back and forth, focusing on the area under your arch. Press the box and the wings slightly to soften them, but avoid crushing them.

Rolling through the shoe

Purpose:

- Gradually soften the shoes while practicing proper technique without putting full weight on pointe.

Method:

- Single-Foot Roll-Up: Stand on one flat foot while slowly rolling the other foot up to demi-pointe and then to full pointe, then back down. This allows you to work through the shoe without bearing your full weight.

- Battement Tendu: Perform battement tendu exercises to work through the shoes. Extend your leg and foot to the front, side, and back while articulating through demi-pointe to full pointe, helping to gently break in the shoes.

Avoid Aggressive Methods

Slamming in Doors:

- Avoid slamming your shoes in doors or other aggressive methods that can damage the structure of the shoes and shorten their lifespan.

Over-Bending:

- Do not excessively bend or twist the shank, as this can weaken it and reduce the support it provides.

Adjusting the Vamp and Platform:

Purpose:

- Customize the shoe to better fit the shape of your foot.

Method:

- If the vamp or platform feels too hard or uncomfortable, gently press and mold these areas with your fingers to soften them slightly.

Caring for Your Pointe Shoes

Proper care can extend the life of your pointe shoes significantly. Here are some tips:

Air Drying

- **After Use:** Always remove your shoes from your dance bag and let them air dry naturally. This prevents moisture buildup, which can weaken the shoes and lead to odor.
- **Avoid Heat:** Do not place shoes near direct heat sources like radiators or in direct sunlight, as this can cause the materials to degrade.

Cleaning

- **Surface Cleaning:** Use a soft, damp cloth to wipe the surface of the shoes. Avoid soaking them, as excessive moisture can damage the materials.
- **Inside:** Sprinkle a small amount of baking soda inside the shoes to absorb moisture and odors.
- Use sachets containing odor-absorbing materials like cat litter crystals or activated charcoal. Commercially available products, such as Sneaker Balls or Deodorizer Sachets, are designed specifically for this purpose and can be placed inside the shoes when not in use.

Proper Storage

- **Ventilation:** Store pointe shoes in a breathable bag, not a sealed plastic one, to allow for airflow.
- **Shape Maintenance:** Use shoe shapers or stuff the toes with tissue paper to help maintain the shape of the box and prevent it from collapsing.

Regular Inspection

- **Check Wear:** Regularly inspect your shoes for signs of wear, especially the shank, box, and ribbons. Replace shoes when they no longer provide the necessary support or comfort.

Recognise when shoes need replacing

Recognising when your pointe shoes need to be replaced is crucial for maintaining foot health and performance quality. Signs that it's time for a new pair include:

- the shank becoming overly flexible or breaking, which compromises support and can lead to injury.
- The box may lose its structural integrity, feeling too soft and not providing the necessary resistance for proper pointe work. You may feel soft spots.
- Visible wear and tear on the outer fabric, such as holes or fraying, also indicate that the shoes are worn out.
- discomfort, pain, or a noticeable decline in your ability to perform movements with precision indicates that your shoes are no longer providing the support and protection required for safe dancing *en pointe*.

Foot care

Dancing *en pointe* places significant demands on the feet, making proper foot care essential for adult dancers. Ensuring your feet are healthy and well-maintained not only enhances performance but also helps prevent injuries and discomfort.

Here are some key aspects of foot care for adult pointe dancers:

Managing Blisters and Calluses

- Blisters and calluses are common among pointe dancers. To manage blisters, keep the affected area clean and covered with a blister pad or bandaid to protect it while dancing. Avoid popping blisters as this increases the risk of infection.
- For calluses, regular use of a pumice stone or foot file can help manage their thickness, but be careful not to remove too much skin, as calluses provide a natural protective barrier.
- If a blister or callus becomes painful or infected, seek advice from a healthcare professional.

Nail Care

- Ensure your nails are trimmed before dancing *en pointe*.
- To help prevent ingrown toe nails, cut the nail straight across, rather than in a curved shape
- Use a nail file to smooth out any rough or sharp edges to avoid nails rubbing against adjacent toes which can cause blisters and cuts
- To avoid cutting them too short, leave a small margin of the white part of the nail visible. Cutting them too short can lead to ingrown toenails, and is more painful when dancing *en pointe*.
- Keep an eye on your toenail colour, especially the big toe. If you notice any bruising keep an eye on it, and possibly take a break. If bruising gets too bad, your toe nail could come off, which will make it extremely painful to dance *en pointe*.

Stretching and Strengthening

- Regular stretching and strengthening exercises are vital for maintaining the flexibility and strength of your feet and ankles.
- Incorporate exercises such as toe curls, calf raises, and theraband resistance exercises into your daily routine.
- Stretching the Achilles tendon and the plantar fascia can help alleviate tightness and prevent conditions such as plantar fasciitis.

Proper Footwear and Pointe Shoe Fit

- Ensuring your pointe shoes fit correctly is one of the most important aspects of foot care.

- Ill-fitting shoes can cause numerous issues, from blisters to more serious injuries. Have your pointe shoes fitted by a professional and ensure they are the right size and shape for your feet.
- Additionally, consider using toe pads, gel inserts, or lamb's wool to cushion your toes and reduce friction inside the shoe.

Rest and Recovery

- Allowing your feet adequate time to rest and recover is crucial, especially after intense training sessions or performances.
- Elevate your feet to reduce swelling and use ice baths or cold packs to soothe sore muscles.
- Incorporate rest days into your schedule to give your feet a break from the continuous strain of dancing *en pointe*.

Professional Support

- Regular visits to a dance physiotherapist or podiatrist can provide professional insights into your foot health.
- These experts can help identify any potential issues early and recommend specific treatments or exercises to address them.
- They can also offer guidance on proper foot care techniques and adjustments to your dance routine to prevent injuries.

Useful items to have with you when dancing *en pointe*

Band-Aids and Blister Pads

- Purpose: Protect against blisters and cover existing ones to prevent further irritation.
- Tips: Keep a variety of sizes and types, including blister-specific pads like Compeed or moleskin.

Toe Nail Clippers and Nail File

- Purpose: Maintain properly trimmed nails to prevent discomfort and injuries.
- Tips: Trim nails straight across and use the file to smooth any sharp edges.

Needle and Thread

- Purpose: Sew ribbons and elastics onto pointe shoes securely.
- Tips: Use strong, thick thread suitable for sewing through tough fabric and leather. Pre-thread a few needles for quick repairs.

Toe Pads and Spacers

- Purpose: Cushion and protect your toes inside pointe shoes.
- Tips: Experiment with gel, foam, or lamb's wool toe pads to find what works best for you. Toe spacers can help align your toes and prevent friction.

Blister Prevention Balm

- Purpose: Reduce friction and prevent blisters.
- Tips: Apply to areas prone to blisters before putting on your pointe shoes.

Foot Powder or Antiperspirant Spray

- Purpose: Keep feet dry and reduce moisture that can cause blisters.
- Tips: Apply to feet before putting on toe pads and shoes.

Small Scissors

- Purpose: Trim loose threads, moleskin, or tape as needed.
- Tips: Ensure the scissors are sharp and small enough to handle delicate tasks.

Gel Inserts or Cushioning Pads

- Purpose: Provide additional cushioning inside pointe shoes.
- Tips: Use these to customize the fit and comfort of your shoes.

Dance physiotherapists and podiatrists

Ensuring your feet and body are well cared for is crucial when dancing *en pointe*, and having the support of knowledgeable professionals can make a significant difference.

What are physiotherapists and podiatrists

Physiotherapists

Physiotherapists specialise in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of physical injuries and conditions related to muscles joints and soft tissues.

Podiatrists

Podiatrists specialise in diagnosing and treating conditions related to the feet, ankles, and lower extremities. They have extensive knowledge of foot anatomy and biomechanics (such as foot structure and gait, optimising foot mechanics for better performance and injury prevention) and foot health (addressing issues such as blisters, calluses, bunions, ingrown toenails, and fungal infections).

What to look for in a physiotherapist and podiatrist

Here's what to look for in physiotherapists and podiatrists to help you stay healthy and perform at your best.

Dance Background:

A physiotherapist or podiatrist with a background in dance or experience working with dancers will have a better understanding of the specific physical demands and common injuries associated with dancing *en pointe*.

Certifications:

Look for certifications or additional training in dance medicine or sports physiotherapy, indicating that the physiotherapist or podiatrist has specialised knowledge in treating dancers.

Understanding of Pointe Technique

- **Anatomical Knowledge:** The physiotherapist/podiatrist should have a deep understanding of the biomechanics of dancing *en pointe*, including the unique stresses it places on the feet, ankles, and lower legs.
- **Technique Assessment:** They should be able to assess your pointe technique and provide guidance on how to improve it to prevent injuries and enhance performance.

Communication and Collaboration

- **Clear Communication:** Look for a podiatrist who communicates clearly and is willing to answer your questions. They should explain your treatment plan and progress in an understandable way.
- **Collaboration with Other Professionals:** They should be willing to collaborate with your dance teachers, physiotherapists, and other healthcare providers to ensure a holistic approach to your care.

Availability and Accessibility

- **Convenient Location:** A podiatrist located near your dance studio or home can make it easier to attend regular appointments.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** Look for someone who offers flexible scheduling to accommodate your dance training and performance commitments.

Positive Reputation and References

- **Recommendations:** Seek recommendations from fellow dancers, dance teachers, or other professionals in the dance community.
- **Reviews:** Look for positive reviews and testimonials from other dancers who have worked with the podiatrist. A good reputation in the dance community is a strong indicator of their expertise and reliability.

Adelaide dance physiotherapists

Smart Health Training

Jenni Guest

Richmond Road, Keswick

<https://www.smarthealthtraining.com.au/>

Flex Clinic Norwood

Anita Bruce

Kensington Road, Norwood

<http://flexclinic.com.au/>

Adelaide Dance Physiotherapy

Erin Pregarc

Lower North East Road, Dernancourt

<http://adelaidedancephysiotherapy.com.au/>

Body Centric

Frome Street, Adelaide CBD

www.bodycentric.com.au/

Move For Better Health

Marelle Wilson

Unley Road, Malvern

www.marellewilson.com.au/

Southside Clinic

Andrea Robertson (Osteopath)

Hughes Street, Unley

<https://southsideclinic.com.au/>