

Interview with dance specialist Dr. Lisa Schoene

Dr. Lisa Schoene, DPM, ATC, FACFAS, is a triple board-certified sports-medicine podiatrist with a specialty in dance. She treats dancers at every level, from beginners to professionals to teachers, and is an expert at evaluating pointe readiness, teaching injury prevention, and treating injuries that do occur. Based in the Chicago area, she has worked with clientele including Ballet Chicago, The Joffrey Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance and many other companies, studios and athletic teams, and is also a prolific writer, teacher and lecturer on sports and dance medicine. www.DrSchoene.com



How do you evaluate dancers for pointe readiness?

"I look at the dancer's ability to point her feet and to balance in a one-footed pose such as a *passé*. I have her do some jumps to learn more about her strength, placement and balance while moving. To assess strength in her hips and core, I see if she can perform a plank (holding the back straight in a push-up position, resting on elbows) and lower her legs together from a raised position, lying on her back. If she can't perform these exercises, with her abdomen in, her core strength needs to be addressed before I would recommend pointe work."

Should a doctor be consulted before my daughter begins pointe?

"If you know a specialist in dance, and pointe work in particular, he or she might be able to provide valuable information. Without this expertise, a doctor is unlikely to understand what is entailed in pointe readiness or dancing on pointe. The most important person to talk with is the dance teacher. Find out his or her criteria for readiness, and how dancers are evaluated. If you feel you need more information, ask for a referral to a dance specialist."

When are dancers ready to start pointe?

"Readiness is individual to the dancer. Generally, though, the most common age is between 11 and 13. Before age 11 or 12, children are less likely to be neurologically, structurally and mechanically capable of the concentration, **proprioception** (awareness of the body in space) and strength needed for pointe work. Emotional maturity is also important, because they need a solid sense of responsibility to care for their bodies and use pointe shoes correctly. After age 14 or so, it can be more difficult to get started, because the feet may not have made the necessary adaptations that occur during ballet training, from constant stretching and strengthening. Many dancers do begin successfully in their teens, though, and even adults can begin pointe with proper training."