

Are pain and damage to the feet inevitable with pointe work?

"Dancers do have to get used to some discomfort from the snugness of pointe shoes and the pressure of carrying the body's weight on the toes. They should not, however, have to suffer significant pain or have their feet deformed. Excellent fitting is essential for keeping the feet healthy. Properly fitted shoes keep feet supported to avoid sinking or **knuckling** (crumpling at the toe joints) into the toe box, and should minimize abrasion and blistering (from the shoe rubbing against the foot). Don't over-pad the toes because thick pads can interfere with the fit and with the dancer's control. I like lamb's wool better than most pads, because it is soft and gentle, it can be molded to fit the contours, nooks and crannies of the toes and to make up for differences in toes' lengths, and it leads to less troublesome wetness than synthetic materials. Dancers should keep their shoes dry and avoid squashing, and they must replace worn-out shoes promptly. In old or misshapen shoes, dancers are more likely to sink, knuckle, **sickle** (roll toward the little toes) or **wing** (roll toward the big toe)."

What should we watch out for during pointe training?

"If your daughter is complaining of pain in her foot or leg, or has bad blisters, damage to the toenails, or redness, swelling or bruising on her feet, she may be having trouble with her shoes or technique. You should be concerned if she becomes unwilling to go to class; pointe work is challenging, but it should be fun if the class is progressing at the right pace with proper technique, in a supportive environment. If you observe class, watch for sickling or winging on pointe, and forced turnout (toes pushed outward so that they are no longer in line with the knees) or over-pronation (rolling toward the big toe) on flat, all of which can lead to injury. On pointe, her body should form a straight, vertical line." (See illustration on page 4.)

How should my daughter take care of her body?

"Young dancers might not understand what an important investment it is to take care of themselves, but I know dancers in their 30s and 40s whose bodies are in wonderful shape because they care for them every day. Encourage your daughter to get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy and nutritious diet and stay hydrated. She should warm up before class and stretch after class. She should avoid forcing her turnout which can lead to serious knee and hip problems as well as bunions and other foot and ankle injuries from over-pronation. Finally, encourage her to do special exercises for the feet and ankles, to augment the work she does in class."