

WHEN TO USE TOE SPACERS

Should I use spacers in my pointe shoes?

The majority of dancers do not need to use spacers in their pointe shoes. But in some cases, spacers can make essential differences to both technique and injury prevention.

Bunions are the most frequent reason for needing spacers. Less commonly, a dancer may need them to correct more minor alignment problems on pointe.

Bunions

If you have bunions or have started developing them, spacers can help relieve pain and slow down progression of misalignment and inflammation. Typically, your fitter will recommend using the wide spacer between your big toe and your second toe. Some dancers also get pinky-toe bunions – also called bunionettes – which can be helped by a narrow spacer between the pinky and fourth toes.

Alignment

In some cases, a spacer is recommended even when there is no sign of a bunion. "There can be a gap between the toes that causes misalignment," says Megan Fuechsl, one of Russian Pointe's expert fitting consultants. "We want the toes to be as straight as possible, to avoid undue force on the big toe joint." This situation usually calls for a small spacer, placed in the gap at the base of the big and second toes.

Avoiding unnecessary use

Unless you really need them, using spacers can do more harm than good. "If your toes are already properly aligned, using a spacer will actually force them out of alignment," Megan explains. As with toe pads, "less is more" regarding what you put into your pointe shoe, she adds. There are also cases when a dancer who has worn spacers before no longer needs them if a better fit is achieved in a new model, size or width.



Wearing spacers in other shoes

Pointework isn't the only time that spacers can help keep toes aligned. "Some dancers also wear them in high heels," Megan notes. "Any time your shoes are pushing your weight forward or compressing your toes, they can help." You might want to use your spacers in character shoes as well as some street shoes, to keep your alignment consistent.

Positive effects

When spacers are needed, they can make a big difference to both comfort and technique! "Dancers feel more stable, their weight is more centered so that they can find their balance, and they no longer feel the discomfort of having their toes angled or sliding inside the pointe shoe," Megan explains.