

Training Turnout – Part 1 – Achieving Your Ultimate Range

Turnout - The elusive attribute that you are either born with, or born without. You know how it goes: Hopefully you have the bony hip structure that lets you sit flat in second splits and easily stand in 5th position, or else you are destined for a lifetime of struggling with your turnout and may as well give up now. That's the way it works, isn't it?

Well, what if that wasn't quite the case... What if the whole picture of "Turnout" was a whole lot more sophisticated, and a whole lot more promising?

The truth is... Most of us have the capacity for a lot more turnout than we currently have, or are using. All it takes is a little education, a little understanding, and a little exploration, to start on the path to much happier hips!



Now **"Turnout"** is a rather huge topic, and so this article is the first of three to help you get the most out of your hips. The first (this one) will be on how to increase your range of motion in various positions, the second will focus on strengthening the right muscles to actually use your new found turnout, and the third will be more focused on working turnout in your extensions.

Now unfortunately, most of us aren't blessed with beautiful open hips from day one. If our hips are tight we usually try to fake it by forcing the knees back while dancing and gripping with the gluteal muscles. Unfortunately while many people try this strategy it is actually not very effective and usually ends up causing more problems than it solves. The same goes for stretching incessantly, perhaps even opening out your hips a little, only to wake up the next day stiffer than you were the day before.

So what is the issue with turnout? Why is it such an elusive quality and why are there so many myths about it floating around in the dance world? And perhaps more importantly, how can those of us with less than perfect rotation dance to our hearts desire without constantly irritating our hips?

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From my point of view, as a physiotherapist who works with dancers every day, there are a few main categories of people who have issues with turnout.



1. **The "It-just-doesn't-happen..." people** - With these dancers, no matter what stretches they do, their hips just seem to get tighter and tighter. They sit cross-legged and their knees go nowhere near the floor, and a lot of the time any stretches they try to do give them pain in the front of the hips...

2. **The "It's-OK-in-some-positions" people** - These dancers find turning out very frustrating... Sometimes it's there and sometimes it's not. They may find it easy to sit in second splits, but struggle to stand in 5th position. Or they can hold it in 5th yet not in a développ e devant...

3. **The "It-just-hurts-to-go-there..." people** - This group may have good range, but whenever they try to train their hips, they seem to get more sore, especially in the front of the hips...

4. **The "I-just-need-to-crack-them-first" people** - This group will have a religious warm up that involves popping the hips either to the front or back to 'release' them before they can work in turnout. This may appear to work well for a while but it has diminishing returns... Often after a few months or years, they need to pop them more often, and may find that the pops are not quite as effective as they once were, or may find that the frequently popped area may start getting sore due to being repeatedly overstretched.

5. **The "I've-got-so-much-I-don't-know-what-to-do-with-it" people** - These dancers can also get very frustrated, as they are constantly told that they have great turnout, and can stretch into all kinds of wonderful positions, however they really struggle to show it when they are dancing, and often get told that they are just not trying.

So what is the solution? Do we all just give up and leave dancing to the ones who have 'natural turnout' and great control? Somehow I don't think that that is an option for all of the millions of us who love to dance despite not having the most open hips! Instead we must discover a way to train each individual's hips specifically, and to train dance teachers to be able to identify different types of hips early, allowing correct training of all students.

In this article we will be focussing on the first 2 groups of people described above, and on ways that you can improve your turnout range safely.

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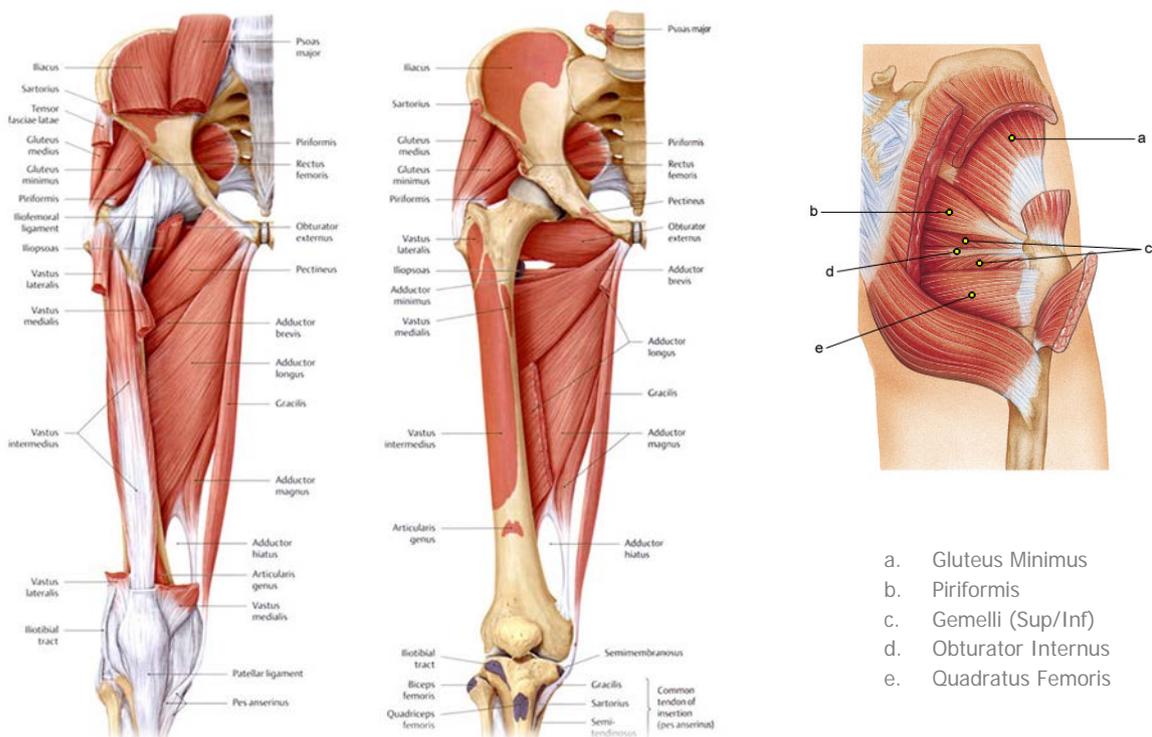
The first thing we need to understand is the basic bony structure that gives our hips their stability. Most people know that the hip is a ball-and-socket joint, but they don't realise just how different everyone's' ball-and-socket joints are. Some people have very deep stable sockets, some are more forward facing and some are more out to the side. Naturally open hips often have a shallow socket that faces more out to the side, but not always.

The biggest problem is that most of us 'accept' that our range is blocked by the bones when this is actually not the case. I had a massive rude awakening to just how much I had unconsciously accepted the fate of my not-so-flexible hips when at the ripe old age of 29 I had a massage that released lots of old, deep tension in my hips, giving me more range than I had at 16! This opened my mind to the possibilities for many other dancers, and led to the development of a program to teach dancer how to open out their hips safely. (For more information on the [Training Turnout Program CLICK HERE](#))

Step One: Become Aware of the Exact Point of Restriction.

Many people blame the bony structure of their hips for a lack in turnout, but actually feel the block on muscular structures around the hips. When you go into a frog stretch, a grande pli , second splits or are standing in 5th, close your eyes and see if you can really feel what is actually stopping you from going further... Is it the front of the hips (TFL?), inside the hip (Iliacus or Psoas Major?), the inside thighs (Adductors and Pectineus), the sides of the hips (Gluteus Medius and Minimus?), the back of the hip (Hip Capsule or SIJ?), or perhaps even in your low back (Lumbosacral Junction).

If you have access to a local Physiotherapist or Osteopath (preferably someone who works with dancers) they should be able to assess your hips in details to work out where the blockage is. Alternatively you can check up on the anatomical diagrams below to identify possible structures that may be blocking your turnout.



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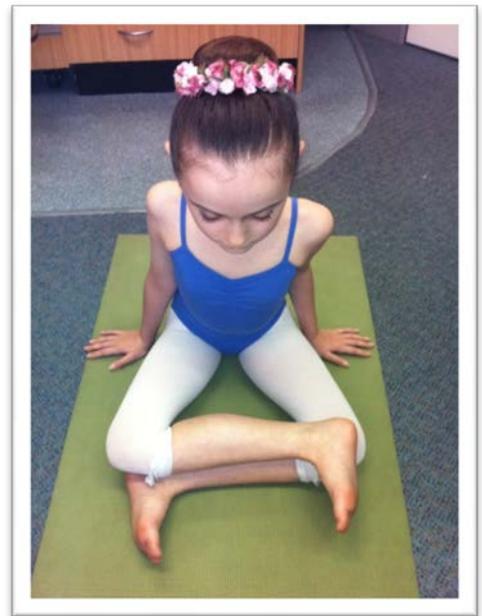
Step Two: Release.

Now you may think that you have tried everything to open out your hips, but often the solution to your restriction is in the opposite direction to the goal when it comes to turnout. Once you have found the point of restriction that is blocking your range, the focus should be on releasing that structure, not necessarily into turnout. However once it has let go a little, you will find that it 'allows' more turnout in the positions that you need it.

Each area described above has several ways to deal with the restriction but here are some of my favourites that you might not have seen before...

For restriction in the sides of the hips – Try the '*Fire Log Pose*' to gently stretch out *Gluteus Medius*.

- Sit on a yoga mat with the legs out in front, as if to sit cross-legged
- Bring the heel of your right foot to sit on top of your left knee
- Try to make your shin bones parallel with each other
- Lean back on your hands and allow the knees to drop out to the sides
- If the hips are very tight in this position, use pillows under your knees initially to allow the hips to relax in a supported position
- Slowly start to lean forward from the hips (keeping the spine straight) to increase the stretch
- Breathe into any feelings of restriction, and focus on consciously relaxing the points of tension in your hips



For restriction further into the back of the hips – try the '*Yogi Sit*' stretch for a deep stretch in *Piriformis*. This is especially good if you find it hard to hold your turnout in devant. Please note – this should not cause any pain in the front of the hips or your knees. Please do not do it if you feel any pain.

- Sit on a yoga mat as above, but cross the legs so that the knees line up on top of each other
- Lean back on the hands to settle in to the position, before slowly leaning forward from the hips
- Focus on keeping the spine long from tailbone to crown, and consciously releasing any restriction, rather than pushing into the stretch



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Step Three: Work Out Why The Muscles Are So Tight!

The main step in resolving restrictions around the hips is that people miss out this very important step. Any tension that is being held in your body is there for a reason, and the true 'cure' for improving your range is actually in identifying why those muscles are getting tight in the first place. I commonly tell people that "The body is in a constant state of reformation" in that it is always adjusting and readjusting to the messages that you give it.

If you repeatedly clench a muscle, it may continue to hold tension long after it is needed. This can happen for many reasons, but most often it is due to chronic emotional stress, anxiety, trying too hard, compensation for other weaknesses or faulty technique, to name just a few. The following are some things to think about if you notice specific points of tension:

Adductors (Inner Thighs)

- Constantly crossing legs when sitting
- Overtraining one component (usually inner range strength) of the inner thigh complex (Yes you can do too many magic circle exercises!)
- Weakness of the stabilisers of the outside of the hip (Gluteus Medius)
- Weak Pelvic Floor (Causes Adductors to grip in an attempt to stabilize the pelvis)
- Emotional protection of the groin area (especially around teenage years)

Gluteus Medius (Side of Hip)

- Gripping with all gluteals to hold turnout
- Reduced isolation of true turnout muscles (Deep External Rotators)
- 'Sitting' into the hip
- Overtraining of Gluteus Medius in shortened or non-functional positions

TFL (Front/Side of Hip) and Rectus Femoris (Front of Thigh and Hip)

- Overuse due to weakness of deeper hip flexors (Psoas Major and Iliacus)
- Poor Multifidus control (Deep Back Stabilizers)
- Reduced Pelvic Floor and Deep Abdominal control
- Weakness in Oblique Abdominals
- Hitching hip in Retiré and Developpé a la Seconde

Once you can identify what is tight, and why it is tight, you will be armed with a completely new strategy to improving your turnout range. Please do not simply force the knees or hips open into classic stretches (froggy, side splits etc). These stretches do not usually help if you have a restriction in range, and sitting for long periods in these poses can actually damage the front of the hips.

Keep posted for Part 2 of this article, which will teach you much more about actually isolating and strengthening your true [turnout muscles](#).

