

Articulation of the Foot

with Lisa Howell from The Ballet Blog

Mastering the articulation of the foot and ankle that should occur in a tendu is quite possibly the single most effective way to prevent foot injuries in dancers. Focusing on the correct execution of this fundamental step can lead to dramatic improvements of all areas of your technique. Underdevelopment of some muscles and overuse of others is a major contributing factor in many common foot and ankle injuries in dancers. The bulk of the power to point the foot comes from the big calf muscles; while the smaller 'extrinsic' foot muscles control the alignment of the ankle and the forefoot and toes are pointed by the small 'intrinsic' foot muscles. It is very important to focus on developing this essential articulation of the foot early in your training and constantly revisit and refine this as you develop. This helps make fluid articulation subconscious and effortless when dancing.

Assess

It is important to get into the habit of assessing your feet prior to commencing each class or performance to see what is needed to get them working well. This may not be the same every day, so the more you learn about your feet the better! Try a few slow pli , several slow tendu and a rise to balance in parallel or first position to see how your feet feel today. What stops you from moving deeper into range? Where exactly is it restricted? How stable do you feel today? Understanding how to resolve a compression at the front of the ankle vs a deep stretch in the back can totally transform your experience of class.

Mobilise - Foot and Ankle Massage Sequence

This simple massage sequence will help relax the soft tissues but still allow you to have full power in your feet. Try doing the sequence on just one foot to feel the difference. Remember to be gentle, and imagine your muscles melting under your warm hand, rather than forcing through the tissues. Work systematically through your deep inner calf muscle, along the arch, under the big toe, between the toes, and up the outside of the lower leg, taking note of what you feel in each area.

Mobilise - 3 D Calf Mobiliser

This technique is amazing for gently mobilising all of the small joints in the foot and ankle. Only do it on the foot that you have massaged. Place the calf on the slightest stretch and focus on gently rotating the thighbone in the socket, allowing the foot to supinate and pronate. Keep the tendons and muscles around the ankle as relaxed as possible and keep both edges of the ball of the foot touching the floor at all times. Do you have more freedom into pronation or supination?



Isolate - Doming

Children as young as 5 years old can start to perform the Toe Swapping exercise. Once a connection to the toes has been developed we can progress to Doming the forefoot to engage the intrinsic muscles of the foot (Lumbricals). Make sure to perform just forefoot doming and keep the muscles and tendons of the lower leg as relaxed as possible. Use your fingers to feel the muscles deep in the back of the calf to avoid cheating.



Integrate - Point through Demi-Pointe with the Ball

There should be a constant focus and revisiting of the articulation of the forefoot in many different ways to help further develop the control of the front of the foot. Exercises such as Point through Demi-Pointe with the Ball can help add resistance and improve endurance of the muscles in the front of the foot. Avoid pointing into a theraband as this can encourage clawing of the toes. Keep sitting up from the sacrum to avoid slumping.



Function - Tendu en Croix

Once a good pattern of articulation has been achieved, move to the inclusion of this articulated movement in every Tendu that you do in class. Integrating the articulation of the forefoot into the tendu may take practice and persistence, but the rewards are enormous. Focus on maintaining stability of the standing leg, and working the foot through a high 3/4 pointe position before pointing the toes in each position. Working in toe thongs can help you practice good articulation without sticking to the floor. Begin in parallel and at the barre, and progress to work in turnout in the centre.



Track your Progress: Monitoring your progress when working towards your goals is essential to keep focussed and see how far you have come. You do not need to do every exercise, every day, but having a strategic plan to get you closer to your goals is very beneficial. Feel free to add in any additional exercises for each section drawn from other programs that are specific to your particular needs. Remember; there is no one correct foot or hip program for everyone, because we all have such different anatomy, history, training and conditioning habits. For more information on training turnout or other areas of the dancers body, please visit www.theballetblog.com.

Home Treatments	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Foot Assessment														
Foot and Ankle Massage														
3 D Calf Mobilser														
Doming														
Point through Demi-Pointe with Ball														
Tendu en Croix														