



How can Sports Massage Therapy aid the dancer?

Introduction

The dancer's life is a hard one they spend years training to become a professional and when they finally reach their goal each day consists of hours of rehearsals and performance. It is inevitable that in the quest for perfection on stage dancers will push their bodies to the limit making their muscles work harder and harder, which can lead to chronic musculoskeletal problems. However, if the performer listens to their body instead of using the 'no pain, no gain' philosophy they can avoid overuse injuries and postural imbalances occurring. By utilising the services available at Pure Sports Medicine we can help the dancer achieve balance, flexibility, strength and alignment.

Common Injuries in dancers

It is impossible for dancers to escape getting injured due to the physical demands they place on their bodies. Acute injuries such as sprains and muscle strains can happen in a split second, whereas chronic problems as a result of overuse and fatigued muscles seem to develop over a period of time.

Most common areas for injuries in dancers are seen in the lower extremities, particularly in the ankle and foot. The dancer is likely to experience cramps, muscle strains, ankle sprains, shin splints, plantar fasciitis, and stress fractures to name just a few.

The knee is highly vulnerable as the dancer is constantly performing deep squats, jumps, and spins which all take their toll on the joint. The turnout position of the hip, which dancers learn from a young age can cause muscle imbalances in the knee for e.g. patellar tracking issues if not addressed. Similarly if the dancer does not have sufficient strength and stability in the surrounding muscles of the hip the whole balance of the hip is upset and it makes it harder for the perfect turnout to be achieved.

The back is another common problem due to the extreme ranges of motion and choreographic demands placed on the body. The dancers back can often just freeze up for no apparent reason causing pain and limited range of motion. A number of causes for this can be fatigue, hypermobility, imbalances (i.e. leg length, postural) or stress.

Injuries to the shoulder and arm are not as common as the lower limb injuries however a lot of choreography requires repeated lifts and spins causing a lot of weight and stress to be placed on the shoulder, arm and wrist.



What can massage do for the dancer?

There are a number of treatments offered at Pure that are of huge benefit to dancers. As a sports massage therapist that has spent two years touring with performers I have identified a number of key areas where massage can aid performance:

1). Improving flexibility and Range of Movement

During a massage treatment session we use a series of assessment techniques, which help us to detect any muscle imbalances within the body. The dancer may be unaware that there is a problem, as it has not reached the pain/injury stage yet. In all dance routines there will be an element of repetition and one-sided movements causing an imbalance in muscle strength and postural stability. Through the use of techniques such as STR, MET and myofascial release the muscle tissue can be lengthened and returned to its optimal state producing a longer leaner body shape, which is aesthetically pleasing. As a result range of motion in the joint is increased and the dancer is able to produce greater power and stamina.

2). Reducing muscle pain

After an intense class/rehearsal or performance you may experience a burning pain in the muscles this can be a result of a build up of lactic acid (product of the body's metabolism as it uses up energy) or microscopic tears and trauma to the muscle fibres and local inflammation. Through effleurage and petrossage the body's circulation is sped up which helps the removal of waste products, nourishing the muscle fibres with valuable nutrients, which helps to restore range of motion and relieve pain.

3). Relieve and reduce cramps/spasms

If you come for a massage on a regular basis you will experience an improvement in your overall performance as the muscles will be longer, leaner and nourished enabling them to perform powerful contractions and delay the onset of muscle fatigue.

4). Psychological Well being

Massage therapy stimulates circulation, which can help to calm nervous tension. It also improves your self awareness so that you as a performer become more body aware and can recognise and feel when their may be a problem starting to appear.