

FITNESS AND DANCESPORT BY THABO



Fitness and DanceSport by Thabo

1. PRINCIPLES OF TRAINING

Start your exercise program slowly to get the most benefits with the fewest risks. If you have not been exercising, start at a low intensity and as you become more fit, gradually increase the amount of time and the intensity of your activity.

A certain degree of physical fitness is essential in competitive dancesport. This is especially true as athletes' progress towards more advanced levels. This manual explores the elements of fitness and suggests training techniques appropriate to dancesport.

You will not become a better dancesport athlete by doing the same training regimen each day. Athletes train by taking hard workouts on one day, feeling sore on the next, and not taking another hard workout until the muscles stop feeling sore.

It's called the hard-easy principle. If you want to become stronger or faster or increase your endurance, you have to exercise hard or long enough to make your muscles burn. Then your muscles will be sore for one or more days. If you try to exercise hard when your muscles are damaged, you will tear them and the muscles will weaken. If you wait for the soreness to disappear, your muscles will be stronger than they were before your workout. As you continue to take stressful workouts only after the soreness disappears, you will become progressively stronger and faster and have greater endurance. Athletes in most sports train once or twice a day in their sports, but they do not exercise intensely more often than every 48 hours.

There is a difference between the good burning of training and the bad pain of an injury. The good burning usually affects both sides of your body equally and disappears almost immediately after you stop exercising. The bad pain of an injury usually is worse on one side of your body, becomes more severe if you try to continue exercising and does not go away after you stop exercising.

What is fitness?

Fitness consists of three elements; strength, flexibility and stamina. Each element is important in the overall fitness of a DanceSport athlete.

Strength

Strength is the ability to exert and sustain force. The strength required by dancesport athletes has characteristics that are different than in other physical sports such as rugby. The dancesport athletes must possess a contained strength. They must be able to exert a considerable amount of pressure effortlessly in a consistent maintainable force.

Strength is what allows the male to lead and the lady to follow. It maintains the correct posture and balance across the dances and allows the fluid effortless glide of movement. Without strength athletes typically have poor connection and are unable to maintain the correct posture and balance.

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Beginners, especially lady beginners often have poor strength. This is manifested in the 'spaghetti arms' syndrome that so often afflicts them. Lack of physical strength is also often the cause that beginners are unable to maintain the correct top line. The men's shoulders start to hunch and the women's left elbows start to drop.

A great deal of control over the muscles in the abdomen are also required, especially so in Latin to help maintain the isolation between the ribcage and the lower half of the body.

Strength should never be overlooked in the overall training routine.

Stamina

Stamina refers to aerobic endurance. This is the ability to maintain a supply of oxygen to the muscles, which is sufficient to maintain the workload of the muscles. Aerobic capacity is essential in dancesport, especially in the faster dances such as Quickstep, Cha-Cha and most notably Jive.

Aerobic endurance is what stops you from getting 'puffed out' when you go for a run. The degree of stamina you require for dancing depends on your orientation between competitive and social dance. Strangely competitive dancing requires a higher aerobic output, as the routines are typically faster but less endurance. This is because each competitive dance rounds typically last at least 2 minutes, just 120 seconds!

Although 2 minutes does not sound very long it can be a lifetime when you are doing an advanced Jive routine! Thus you have to keep on training to be prepared for such level.

Flexibility

The flexibility you need depends greatly on the requirements of your choreography. Some routines require great flexibility while others do not. However a certain degree of flexibility is essential in all dances.

Stretching before and after dancing cannot only improve basic technique but it will also lessen your chances of injury. Common injuries in dancing related to poor flexibility included strained ligaments, Achilles tendon and pulled muscles. Less common are 'shin splints' which is caused by poor flexibility in the muscles of that area.

Training is essential and these aspects should be taken into consideration:

Strength

Upper and lower body strength is required in dancesport with a particular focus on the back, shoulders, arms and calves. Dancesport athletes should develop an overall strong body to improve their control technique.

There are a number of training methods available to build strength for dancesport athletes that will not add too much muscle bulk but a lean, well-defined body.

Swimming is an excellent exercise for the back, shoulders and triceps (rear arms). It will also to a certain extent work some muscles in the legs and improve aerobic capacity. Swimming

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is most popular with women who may feel intimidated using a gym, but a gym should not be ruled out.

Weight training is good for gaining strength especially for man. There is often a misconception that weight training will lead to bulky muscle and mass. A specialised weight-training program will add strength while building a lean, toned body.

To avoid mass is in the number of reps you perform for each exercise. A set is just a group of reps; so 3 sets of 10 would mean 30 reps in groups of 10 with a short rest in between. To avoid mass and gain strength use higher reps, 3-4 sets of 12-15 reps of each exercise will have the maximum effect.

If you are new to weight training take care and start off slowly. Always warm up by stretching and for the first few sessions limit yourself to 2 sets of each exercise.

Below is a list of basic exercise for those new dancesport athletes to training:

Figure 1

Part	Exercise	Sets	Reps
Back/Biceps	Sitting Row	3	12/15
Chest/Shoulders & Triceps	Bench Press	3-4	12/15
Shoulders/Triceps	Seated Shoulder Press	3	12/15
Triceps/Chest & Shoulders	Press Ups	3	Individual, till you can't do anymore!
Biceps	Barbell Curls	3	12/15
Legs/Back/Biceps/Shoulders & aerobic capacity!	Rowing Machine	1	20-25 minute session.

Try and manage the above exercises twice a week. You do not have to do them all at once; for example you may want to do the weight exercises one day and the press ups and rowing machine on another.

Most of the exercises above work more than one muscle at the same time and are called combination exercises. This group of exercises generally tends to build overall strength quicker than exercises designed to work a single body part.

Strength: benefits when each body part worked 2-3 times per week

- Improve body composition & more muscle, toned appearance
- Raise resting metabolism
- Reduce risk of osteoporosis
- Improve strength for both daily life tasks and dance performance

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Aerobic Capacity

Aerobic exercise is any prolonged activity that makes you breathe hard while using the large muscle groups at a regular, even pace. Aerobic activities help make your heart stronger and more efficient. They also use more calories than normal daily activities. Some examples of aerobic activities include:

- **Brisk walking • Jogging • Bicycling • Swimming • Aerobic dancing**
- **Racket sports • Rowing • Ice or roller-skating • Cross-country or downhill skiing • Using aerobic equipment (e.g., treadmill, stationary bike)**

To achieve health benefits from aerobic activity, you should exercise at a level strenuous enough to raise your heart rate to your target zone. Your target heart rate zone is 50 to 75 percent of your maximum heart rate. To find your target zone, look for the category closest to your age in the chart and read across the line. For example, if you are 45 years old dancing Masters section, your target heart rate zone is 88-131 beats per minute.

Age Target Heart Average

Rate Zone Maximum Heart: 50-75% Rate 100%

20-30 years 98-146 beats/min. 195

31-40 years 93-138 beats/min. 185

41-50 years 88-131 beats/min. 175

51-60 years 83-123 beats/min. 165

61+ years 78-116 beats/min 155

To see if you are exercising within your target heart rate zone, count the number of pulse beats at your wrist or neck for 15 seconds, and then multiply by four to get the beats per minute. If you have problems counting your pulse this way, a commercially available heart rate monitor may help. Your heart should be beating within your target heart rate zone. If your heart is beating faster than your target heart rate, your exercise intensity is too high and you should slow down. If your heart is beating slower than your target heart rate, you should increase your exercise intensity.

The aerobic capacity required for dancesport varies with level and type of dance an athlete is involved with. Quickstep, Jive and Cha-Cha are quite possibly the most demanding of dances.

For social dancing athletes require the ability to maintain a moderate aerobic capacity over a prolonged period of time. Jogging, cycling are excellent to develop this kind of fitness.

Athletes also require the ability to maintain a moderate level of output for long periods for practice. Additionally they must also be able to produce short bursts of high aerobic output to cope with advanced routines over short rounds in a competition.

On top of the basic aerobic fitness methods outlined above competitive athletes would benefit from exercises such as running, shuttle runs and sprinting. One easy exercise is to jog for the distance of two street lamps and then sprint from the second to the third street lamp. This is maintained for up to 25 minutes or so and really keeps the heart and lungs pumping fast!

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Aerobic Fitness benefits when done 3-5 times a week at 60-85% of maximum heart rate

- Improve body composition & less fat!
- Decrease tension, help you sleep better
- Reduce blood pressure and risk of heart disease
- Improve your dance performance
- Add years to your life

Warning!

Do be careful when exercising make sure you always warm up and stretch properly beforehand. Untrained muscles really are easy to injure. If you have any doubt about your medical conditions do seek your doctors' advice beforehand or have a fitness assessment by a qualified coach or physiotherapist.

How to warm up

Warming up before you exercise or dance intensely prevents injuries and helps you to dance better, jump higher, run faster, lift heavier and throw further.

You do not warm up to increase muscle temperature because heating a muscle does not prevent injuries or make the muscle contract with more force. You warm up to bring in more muscle fibres to contract at the same time. It's called recruitment. Muscles are made of millions of individual fibres. When you contract a muscle for the first time, you use less than one percent of your muscle fibres. The second time you bring in more fibres, and you keep on increasing the number of muscle fibres used in each contraction for several minutes of using that muscle. Usually you are warmed up when you start to sweat. Then when you contract more muscle fibres, there is less force on each individual fibre to help protect them from injury. It is important to warm up before you start with your section or rounds at the competition, because by then you will be preparing your body muscles for action.

Cooling down after a workout or dance round

You should not stop suddenly after dancing or doing any other thing that require very intense exercise, because it may cause you to pass out.

During dancing, your leg muscles serve as a second heart. When your leg muscles relax, the veins near them fill up with blood. When your leg muscles contract, they push against the veins near them and squeeze the blood toward your heart. If you exercise vigorously and stop suddenly, the leg muscles stop contracting and blood can pool in your legs, so not enough blood passes to your brain and you can pass out. When you slow down gradually, you allow time for your heart to pump harder to make up for the loss of pumping by your legs. Cooling down does not prevent muscle soreness, which is caused by a tearing of muscle fibres during exercise, not by the build-up of lactic acid when you run so fast that you can't get enough oxygen.

Stretching during the cool-down period also provide an ideal opportunity to improve your flexibility, because the muscles and connective tissue surrounding the joints are warmer during the cool-down period than at any other time in the training session. An additional benefit of stretching during the cool-down is that it may speed your recovery from muscle soreness.

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TIPS FOR OUTDOOR WINTER EXERCISE IF YOU DO BRAVE THE WEATHER:

- **Dress appropriately.**

Dress in layers. You should be a little cool starting out. You don't want to sweat a lot and become chilled. Most heat loss is through the head - wear a hat. Wear synthetic fabrics that keep moisture away from your skin. Wear brightly colored or reflective clothing so drivers can see you.

- **Drink plenty of fluids.**

Even in cold weather you need to drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

- **Exercise "defensively."**

Beware of slippery surfaces. Exercise in daylight, if possible. Anticipate that drivers may not be able to see you or stop quickly.

- **Talk to your doctor.**

Some medical conditions make working out in the cold un-safe. Exercising in cold weather can bring on angina (heart-related chest pain). Cold air can also trigger asthma in some people with this condition. Wearing a facemask or scarf over your mouth can help. If you're older or fairly inactive, talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.