



dear john

Q A

How should I manage dance injuries (or avoid them completely if at all possible)?

I'm neither a doctor or a dancer – in fact anybody brave enough to dance with me would probably need the services of a doctor soon afterwards. However, I have had the privilege of working with some extremely talented dancers, both during their artistic career and also in one of the many professions that dancers tend to excel in once they hang up their performing shoes.

Whether or not statistics confirm this, it's my own belief that precisely because the profession demands such a huge degree of energy,

resilience, attention to appearance, as well as an understanding of the importance of teamwork, dancers are among the performers best placed to succeed in the widest variety of alternative roles.

Naturally, it is far better when a dancer or any other performer ends up in one of those alternative roles by choice rather than due to injury. With this in mind, here are two dance professionals with experience of dealing with dance injuries – and just as importantly, dance fitness – to share some tips.

what the experts say...



Jennie Morton

Jennie Morton BSc (hons) osteopathy, UCL honorary lecturer, MSc performing arts medicine, is an ex-ballet and musical theatre performer who now specialises in treating performers. She runs clinics in London and Hertfordshire and is the founder of www.healthyperformers.com. Jennie also runs healthy practice workshops for performers and teachers and training courses for medical practitioners caring for performers. Additionally, she works with the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine in the UK and the Performing Arts Medicine Association in the US.

"Dancers tend to have very high pain thresholds and pain is often a daily occurrence, so distinguishing between a niggle and a more serious injury can be difficult.

"Pain is an alarm signal from the body and should not be ignored. Seeking professional help from a dance specialist is the best way to avoid a niggle turning into a more serious issue.

"I often see dancers with long-term injuries and their reason for delaying treatment (besides financial) is they fear being told to stop. It is actually quite rare for me to tell a dancer to completely stop –

I see it as a priority to keep them on stage where they belong. This requires modifying technique and training behaviours and building self-help programmes to ensure optimal rehabilitation and prevention of further injury.

"I would love to see more emphasis on injury prevention in professional dance training. So many of the injuries I see result from the dancer having embodied an image of a particular movement which actually runs counter to their anatomy. This can lead to use of the anatomy which may result in injury. Teaching anatomy with the use of imagery is at the heart of my work to help dancers understand how to use their bodies safely using a language they can engage with.

"Regular massage is a great way to enhance performance by ensuring good fuel delivery and adequate waste drainage for the muscles. Fatigue is one of the most common causes of injury. An optimally controlled body allows more freedom for expression. Dancers who have embodied this concept are often the ones to draw the eye of the audience."

Amy Louise Thake

Amy Louise Thake joined the Royal Ballet School at 16 where she began performing and touring with both the Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet companies. A semi-finalist in the 2003 Genee International Ballet Competition and winner of the Barbara Fewster award in the same year, she graduated in 2004 and spent a season with Vienna Festival Ballet before joining the National Ballet of Ireland. Progressing in the company to coach and rehearse dancers for certain roles as well as teaching company class, she joined Yorke Dance Project in 2011.



"It's common knowledge that when you get an injury you should have it checked out as soon as possible to help limit the time off incurred. As a freelance dancer, with no institution looking after your costs or rehabilitation, the financial aspect of an injury can be outrageous, often deterring you from seeking help. Maintenance is also an issue.

"I know when I'm working my body needs a regular massage. This helps prevent certain niggles that occur due to muscle tightness.

"Definitely the wrong way to look at an injury is with a negative

state of mind. Yes, they are upsetting and worrying but they can be a good time to look at your technique and to learn from the other dancers you're surrounded by. It's imperative when injured to be aware of your emotional outlook. I find it plays a big part in recovery, and even if an injury is hard to deal with, acknowledging your emotions is a good start on the road to recovery and being back fully fit.

"I certainly know when my body feels good or bad on any given day and adjust the percentage of effort and I do as a result. I also know what pain I can work with and when professional help is needed.

"It can be very reassuring speaking to a professional who sees similar and worse injuries daily. It can help put certain injuries in perspective. As for enhancing performance, the only way to put your all in to a performance is if you feel completely on top of your game and this comes from being physically and mentally healthy – so proper care is essential for enhancing anyone's performance."

dear john sums up...

In sharing Jennie's and Amy's advice above, it should be pretty obvious that keeping ourselves physically and mentally in good condition is a sensible career move for all of us, no matter what area of the arts our career is rooted in.

As they both also note, completely avoiding injury of any sort in an entire career is probably not possible. For both reasons I'm delighted to have the opportunity to once again put some well-deserved spotlight in the direction of the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine which provides specialist health support to all full-time and part-time professional and student performing artists, plus production crew, throughout the UK.

As both our guests acknowledge, financial concerns are often one of the key factors which prevent people in this profession addressing health concerns in good time to prevent them becoming even more costly both financially and career-wise. This certainly makes BAPAM a charity worth supporting, and the wealth of information and resources makes its website (www.bapam.org.uk) a destination well worth checking out.

John Byrne is an entertainment industry career adviser. Details of career advice sessions, workshops and copies of *The Right Agent Right Now* ebook are available from www.adviceforperformers.com. Jennie Morton may be contacted via her website www.healthyperformers.com