

Why is it important to understand the body's range of motion and types of stretching?

Stretching in a warm-up should only be within your range of motion (ROM) around each joint. Stretching past your ROM to improve flexibility should only be attempted in your cool down when you are very warm and more relaxed (static and PNF stretching). If you have ever done a vigorous stretch class or sat in static stretches for a long period of time you will know how hard it is to even stand let alone dance because your legs feel like wobbly jelly. By holding static stretches you are elongating the muscles. When we dance we need our muscles to constantly be contracting to help us stabilize balances, propel into jumps and land with control. Static stretches before dancing send the wrong message to your muscles, asking them to lengthen and relax then expecting them to be strong and contract immediately after. We want to avoid weakening the muscle right before we need to use it. Therefore, smooth dynamic stretching is recommended before dancing.

Types of Stretching

DYNAMIC

Dynamic stretching is recommended for a warm-up because it is gentle, active movement to contract and relax the muscles ready to take class or perform. Examples of dynamic stretches are: leg swings, on the floor for contemporary class or Grand Battement and Grand Battement en cloche exercises; yoga salutations; torso twists; squats and lunges. Start your dynamic stretches slowly and gradually increase in speed and power until you reach your full range of motion. Any stretches that have constant motion would be suitable dynamic stretches for a warm-up before dancing. Advantages of dynamic stretching are: it involves multiple joints; replicates movement patterns that are required during dancing; provides neuromuscular training to improve coordination; strengthens the contracting muscle; and keeps the core body temperature elevated so that muscles and surrounding tissues remain pliable.

Not to be confused with ballistic stretching which is bouncing whilst in a stretch and going past the range of motion. Ballistic stretching is harmful because the muscle tries to protect itself by contracting and this can result in muscle tears.



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STATIC

Static stretches are held stretches and should only be undertaken in a cool down. One example is the splits. To gain any benefit from a static stretch you should hold for 30 seconds. After the 30 second mark sensors in your muscles relax allowing you to ease further into the stretch. For even better results repeat the static stretch three times, relaxing in between and moving further into the muscle's range. There is no benefit to holding a stretch for longer periods of time. It can actually have the opposite effect than desired.



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