Helpful Hints

Injuries and Dance

Dance is often unjustly associated with injury. It is actually very rare that young children incur any injury while learning how to dance. Instead, the training itself normally strengthens muscles, corrects posture and enhances flexibility, all of which greatly assist in the development of the body. The development of attitude, relaxation and concentration all provide additional assistance in a child's positive development. Furthermore, while most physical activities strain the body, dance is one of the few that incorporate a warm-up process into the activity itself.
Injuries, when they do occur, happen as with other athletic sports at later stages in a person's training. It is later when they have completed learning the technical basis of the dance that they begin pushing their muscles and bodies beyond their normal limits. Still, injuries are only likely when the body has not developed properly or the dancer has not warmed up and stretched correctly prior to exerted efforts.

Common Problems

When speaking of injury, there are many types to which doctors will refer. These are the most common that relate to dancers in their training:
Muscle Strain: Damage to a muscle.
Tendon Strain: Damage to a tendon.
Tendonitis: Inflammation of a tendon.
Sprain: Damage to a ligament.
Shin-splint: A microscopic tearing of ligament fibers in the lower leg, away from their point of origin.
Fracture: A break in the bone.

Preventative Care

Dancers who are trained to use their bodies correctly from the start are less prone to injury in later years. Diet, tiredness, temperature and even emotional state can all affect a dancer's likelihood of injury. A proper diet provides the correct nutrition to allow the muscles to work efficiently. Rest ensures that the body can perform at its best ability. Muscles function much better in warm environments than cold. Also, in the cold, muscles will contract much more quickly when not moving, thus reducing the benefits of stretching and warming up much faster.

Common Causes

Most dance injuries are caused by misalignment or incorrect execution of the technique. Over time, this predisposes the body to injury. Cleary, some body types are naturally better suited to dance. Those few in an ideal situation have a wide range of motion and natural strength that allows them to properly control their motion much earlier in their development. The majority of students, however, must be certain that they identify limitations and work with them properly. Those with shorter ligaments have a narrower range of motion and should always perform stretching with care in order to lengthen the ligaments as they build stronger muscles to protect the joints. Those with longer ligaments have a wider range of motion and so must ensure they keep properly aligned to assist the joints and build strength.

Recovery

A dancer can assist the body in the recovery process in addition to exercises and treatment prescribed by the doctor and physiotherapist.
Avoid Stimulants: Substances containing caffeine, NutraSweet or mint such as coffee, tea, chocolate and soft drinks are neural stimulants that negatively affect recovery.
Eat Natural Foods: Food additives often contain chemicals that are stored in muscles and affect their ability to repair and renew. Natural foods are therefore preferable.
Drink Water: Water flushes out the impurities in the body and helps it to heal itself.
Breathe Deeply: Oxygen helps the healing process while panic and fear interfere. Take deep breaths when an injury occurs.

Treatment

Always consult with your doctor and your dance teacher whenever you are injured. Keep in mind that your doctor may not be familiar with ballet exercises. It can be very helpful if you demonstrate the kind of exercises that you would be doing in class so that your doctor can tell you which ones might help you and which you should avoid or reduce. Always let your dance teacher know what your doctor has told you so that you can work together to ensure that your treatment results in the fastest and safest possible recovery. Never ignore an injury. It can too easily develop into serious problems later on.