

Dancers: Are Foot Cramps Getting to You?

Dr. Tina A. Boucher, DPM

A staff member of mine who does ballet twice a week told me that she was getting nasty foot cramps while dancing. Every time she stretches her foot, pointing it in a tendu or the like, she has a clenching of muscles in her arches.

Foot cramping is caused by dehydration, a lack of potassium which helps keep our body chemistries regulated, poor circulation and lack of oxygen being carried to the feet, and pinched nerves. If the feet are overworked, they are more susceptible to foot cramps.

In order to prevent foot cramping, dancers should be drinking water consistently throughout the day. Eating foods high in potassium, like bananas and peanut butter will help increase the levels of this mineral in your body and re-regulate your body chemistry. Dancers with injuries to their feet should wrap an ice pack around the foot cramp, but not directly on the area that is affected.

If the foot cramps are chronic, dancers should use warm, damp washcloths on the cramp three times a day and wrap the affected foot with an elastic bandage. Dancers with persistent foot cramps should attempt to stay off that foot until the problem clears.

Dancers who have portable bars in their studio should stand on the edge of the bar and let their feet hang off the edge. This will loosen up the muscles from the calves to the feet. Doing runner's lunges (one leg in front of the other, back leg straight and heel barely touching the ground, front leg bent at the knee at a 90 degree angle and weight forward on the front leg) will also help stretch out the muscles. Before class, dancers should warm their feet up with Pinky Balls, a small rubber ball, by rolling their feet over and over the ball.

Dr. Tina A. Boucher, DPM practices in Meriden, CT and is a former dancer. Her website is www.centralctfootcare.com and her blog is www.centralctfootcare.blogspot.com