

IS MY BALLERINA READY FOR EN POINTE?

After a few years of training, many young and growing ballerinas long to begin training *en pointe*. This is a decision that must not be taken lightly. Many successful professional ballerinas did not begin training *en pointe* until age sixteen, and this did not negatively impact their careers.

Because of wide variation in child development and body maturation, many experts believe that proper ballet training cannot begin until at least 8 years of age.

Jane S. Chung, M.D., sports medicine physician at Scottish Rite for Children tells us, "Rather than focusing on an age to begin training in any sport or physical activity, the overall readiness of the child is most important. This means to look at both the physical and mental readiness before making a decision."

WHAT IF SHE STARTS TOO EARLY?

There are many risks associated with starting to train *en pointe* too early. In earlier stages of development, a child's strength, mobility and coordination are all very immature. These lead to a higher risk of physical injury. These physical challenges also lead to failure to master sophisticated techniques. With early injuries and frustrations, dancers may develop lower self-esteem and in some cases become anxious or discouraged.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITION TO EN POINTE?

A ballerina who:

- is on a pre-professional track.
- takes two or more ballet classes per week.
- has at least three years of classical ballet training.
- can achieve and maintain proper posture and alignment of the hips, knees and ankles.
- can recognize when her body is in proper alignment.
- has strong core strength.
- has enough leg strength and range of motion.

WHO IS QUALIFIED TO ADVISE A DANCER ABOUT READINESS FOR EN POINTE?

There is no one person best qualified to make this decision about a young dancer. A team approach with a broad perspective is important. A dance instructor, a sports medicine physician, physical therapist, parents, and most importantly the ballerina, should be working together to evaluate all aspects of readiness.



For a consultation about your ballerina's physical readiness for en pointe training or other needs of a young female athlete, please call to schedule an appointment with Jane S. Chung, M.D. For more information about pediatric sports medicine, visit scottishriteforchildren.org/sports.

The great George Balanchine-ballet choreographer once said, "There is no reason to get a young dancer up on full pointe if she cannot do anything when she gets there!"



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