

Stretching For Hip Flexors

The hip flexors are a group of muscles that collectively create a flexion or bend of the hip joint so that the leg is raised in front of the body. These muscles include primarily the iliopsoas, the rectus femoris (a part of the quadriceps), and the sartorius, although there are secondary, smaller muscles involved in this movement as well. These muscles produce movement where the leg is raised in front of the body which includes dance movements such as a tendu, dégagé, front développé, front attitude, front battement, or when raising the leg in the front of the body for a jump or a leap. Aside from these movements, the hip flexors along with the core musculature are also important muscles for pelvic stability; or the ability to keep your pelvis in a particular position while all or a part of the body move in another direction. The strength and stability of the hip flexor muscles are of great importance to a dancer.

It is also important to understand another side of what these muscles do. Whenever the leg is extended or is placed behind the body, these muscles stretch to allow for that movement to happen. Having adequate hip flexor flexibility is absolutely essential for proper technique when working the leg behind the body. If there is an inadequate amount of flexibility here, the dancer may not reach the height that is desired for the proper technique and will make compensations such as excessive hyperextension of the low back or rotating or opening the hip to achieve the desired technique. Therefore, it is of great importance that a dancer has an adequate amount of flexibility with their hip flexor muscles.

This flexibility can be achieved through a having a dancer follow a stretching program that includes stretches for the hip flexors. It is important that these (as all stretches) should be done carefully, with the body warmed up, and with a slow and steady application of stretch that allows for pain-free movement throughout the range of motion for that joint. The most popular stretch for the hip flexors is a lunge stretch with the front leg in a lunge position and the back leg stretched out long behind the –or in”), and pressing forward slightly, there will be a slight stretch in front of the back hip there as well. For a variation, you can also perform this stretch with the back leg turned out.



If you are fairly flexible and looking for more advanced stretches you can simply take the previous stretch and slide the front leg forward and into the split position. Leaning backward or raising the heel of the back leg will intensify the stretch of the hip flexor even more. Note that the dancer has her hips squared and her back leg tucked under, not turned out.



Another more advanced stretch is to place one leg behind you on a chair and walk the front foot forward until you are in a position similar to a lunge. Begin to slowly bend your front knee and drop your hips until you feel a stretch across the front of the back hip. This can be performed turned out as well.



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There is a lot of controversy over the type of stretching an athlete should participate in and whether static stretching just prior to a performance can decrease power output and thus performance. However, because dancers require an incredible amount of flexibility at all times, it is appropriate to do static stretching separate from when you are dancing or training. This means that to gain lasting flexibility, there should be a separate stretching time outside of dance practice or in training and that each stretch should be held for at least 30 seconds. There are more stretches out there to gain flexibility in the hip flexors, however working through these stretches after warming up and moving slowly into position will definitely increase your flexibility in the front of your hip and allow you to move with a greater range of motion and improve your technique.

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Allison Seifert has a Masters degree in Human Performance with an emphasis in Strength and Conditioning from the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse in La Crosse, Wisconsin. During her time at UW – La Crosse, she worked with the UW – La Crosse Sports Performance program implementing training programs for all sports during her two years as a graduate student. She spent her last spring semester at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri as a strength and conditioning intern assisting in all facets of a DI Sports Performance program. Prior to UW-La Crosse, Allison attended the College of Saint Benedict in Saint Joseph, Minnesota where she received her Bachelor's degree in Nutrition and Sports Medicine. During her time there, she was also a four year member and captain of the St. Ben's Dance Team. She also worked as an assistant to the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach implementing training programs focused on injury prevention and promoting athletic success for the St. Ben's athletes. After graduation, she began working

with Advantage Dance as a strength and conditioning and nutrition contributor. During that time, she also interned at Velocity Sports Performance in Burnsville, Minnesota as a performance coach intern where she implemented Velocity training programs designed to enhance sports performance techniques in the athletes that she worked with. Allison also spent time working for SSTAR (Sport Specific Training and Rehabilitation) in Eagan, Minnesota in where she worked as a performance trainer developing and enhancing sport performance techniques with an emphasis in injury prevention. Allison also provided nutrition services to high school athletes at SSTAR. She is a certified strength and conditioning specialist through the National Strength and Conditioning Association. She is also a certified Pilates instructor.

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