

Flexibility Circuits for Dancers

by Meredith Butulis

Methods to improve flexibility come in many varieties.

When working with a group of dancers all at the same time, the greatest benefits will come from incorporating a variety of methods. This is particularly important, as there will be many individual differences. Additionally, dance team dancers are going through growth spurts, so what works best from week to week can change rapidly. To address many muscles and types of stretching in a short period of time use a stretching circuit, just as strength training can be done in a circuit fashion.

Dancers need to focus on stretching many muscle groups, with some of the most important being the hip flexors, the hip turnout muscles, hamstrings, calves, pecs, and lats. With all stretches, it is important to cue the dancer on where the stretch should be felt. For example, when teaching a hamstring stretch, the stretch should be in the middle of the back of the thigh. If the stretch is primarily at the butt bone (where the growth plate is) be sure to cue the dancer to reposition immediately to feel the stretch in the appropriate location. Here is another example for the hip flexors; the stretch should be in the front of the hip, thigh, or abdomen area (depending on the exact stretch) as opposed to in the knee joint.

Here is a sample circuit to help improve hip flexor flexibility. While hip flexor flexibility is important for all leaps, it is particularly noted for its importance in firebirds, scorpions, and contemporary style leaps.

Similar circuits of myofascial release-static stretch-dynamic stretch can be created for the other key muscle groups for dancers.

Since a stretched muscle quickly returns to its starting position, **it is important to have your dancers stretch on a daily basis.** With practice, most dancers will be able to achieve right and left splits. However, not all dancers will be able to perform the center splits or straddles. On the performance side, even dancers that cannot perform straddles on the floor may still have great Russian jumps and very nice side leaps.

Five minute hip flexor stretch circuit:



1

Myofascial

Foam roller myofascial release to the front of the thigh, inside of the thigh, and outside of the thigh. In these areas, find 5 'tight spots' and place body weight into the foam roller. Hold each of the 5 'tight spots' for 20 seconds each.



2

Kneeling Hip Flexor

Static stretch in kneeling hip flexor stretch position for 30 seconds on each side.



3

Kneeling Thigh

Static stretch in kneeling thigh stretch position for 30 seconds on each side.



4

Toe Tuck Under Splits

Static stretch in splits with back toe tucked under so that the back knee is off the floor for 30 seconds on each side.



5

Battlement Back

Dynamic stretch by performing 10 battlements back on each side.