



JOHNS HOPKINS  
M E D I C I N E

Performing Arts

# DanceFIT

Recommended Exercises



Dear Dancer,

Congratulations on taking the first step to becoming a stronger, healthier, dancer! The exercises in this packet have been specifically chosen by the Johns Hopkins Performing Arts Physical Therapists to address the common problems that we see leading to injury in dancers. If you have completed the DanceFIT screen, you have a results page that will recommend specific exercises for you based on the areas of weakness that were found during your screening. If you have not had a DanceFIT screen you may select exercises based on what skills you want to improve. Next to each exercise you will find specific skills that may improve by performing that particular exercise regularly. All of these exercises are great cross training tools for any dancer to use. When performing these exercises you should do them 3-4x per week. One day in between exercises is best for recovery of your muscles. It takes 6 to 8 weeks to build muscle strength, so keep it up! If you have pain with these exercises or while dancing, please seek medical attention.

Happy Dancing!

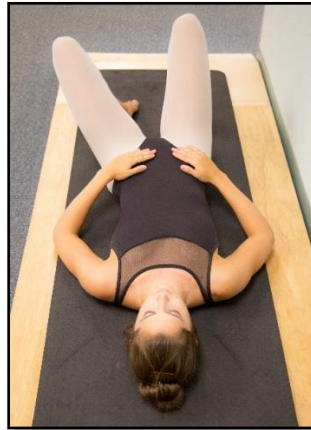
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## Bent Knee Fallouts

To improve: Pelvic control, turnout, balance

- 1.) Laying on your back, bend knees with feet on floor and hip distance apart, place hands on hip bones
- 2.) Keeping a neutral pelvis and abdominals flat, allow knee to fall out to 45 degrees with control, while opposite leg stays completely still. Important to keep pelvis from moving the entire time!
- 3.) Return knee back to parallel start position
- 4.) Perform 10x, then repeat on the other side
- 5.) Then perform 10x alternating legs



## Bridging

To improve: Hamstring strength, hip stability, balance, arabesque, jumping, relevé

1. Lay on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground
2. Pull your belly towards your spine, tighten your abdominals, squeeze your buttocks together and lift your bottom off the ground.
3. Press your heels into the ground and lift your toes to avoid hamstring cramping.
4. Hold for 10 seconds and do 10 times.



Progress to single leg bridging: Begin with one leg off the ground and use only one leg to lift your bottom off the ground. Keep your pelvis level, do not let one side drop towards the ground

## Table-Top Holds

To improve: lower abdominal strength, hip stability, développés, grand battement, leaps

- 1.) On your back with your hands at your sides
- 2.) Activate abdominals to then lift one leg up into a 90 degree angle
- 3.) Without letting your lower back arch away from the floor lift up the other leg into a 90 degree angle so that your shins are parallel to the floor
- 4.) Slowly lower one leg to the floor followed with the other leg to resume start position
- 5.) Repeat 5x leading with one side and then 5x with other side



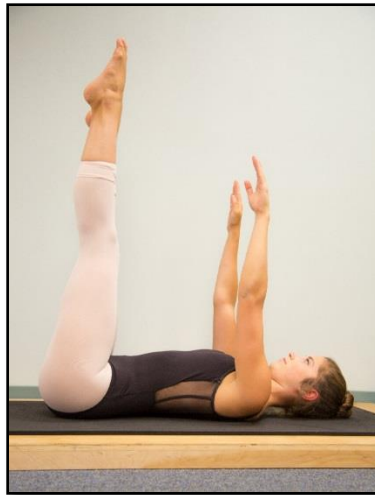
### Progression with chest lift

Advanced progression: begin in the same position as above, tuck your chin and lift your head, neck and shoulders up off the mat. Keep the chest lift while performing the exercise

## Dead Bugs

To improve: abdominal strength and endurance, grand battements, leaps

- 1.) Lay on your back with your arms and legs pointing straight up to the ceiling.
- 2.) Draw your abdominals in towards your spine to keep your pelvis in a neutral position.
- 3.) Slowly lower one leg towards the ground and the opposite arm overhead towards the ground.  
Only lower the arm/leg as low as you can without letting your back arch.
- 4.) Return to starting position and repeat on the other side. Do 10 times each side alternating.



Progression with chest lift

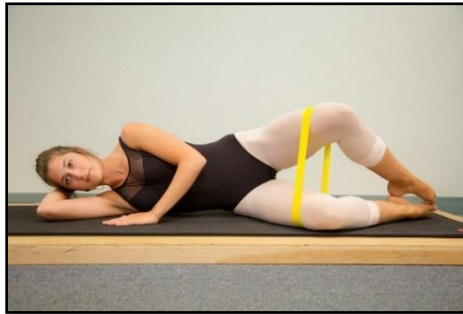


Advanced progression: begin in the same position as above, tuck your chin and lift your head, neck and shoulders up off the mat. Keep the chest lift while performing the exercise

## Clamshells

To improve: Turnout, lateral rotator strengthen, passé

- 1.) On your side, bend knees to approximately 45 degrees with legs and feet stacked
- 2.) Lift waist off of the mat to keep some space between trunk and the floor
- 3.) Keeping feet together, lift the top knee to slightly above hip height and hold for 5 seconds
- 4.) Slowly lower knee back down to start position, perform for 10 reps
- 5.) Then repeat on other side

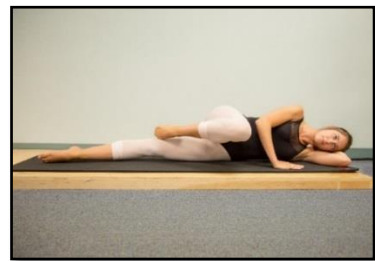


To increase challenge of this exercise, place resistive elastic band slightly above the knees

## Side-lying single leg passé

To improve: Turnout, lateral rotator strengthen, passé

- 1.) On your side, keep legs straight out on mat
- 2.) Slightly turnout top leg, keeping hips stacked, placing top arm down on mat in front of chest
- 3.) Slide top leg into passé
- 4.) Allow passé leg to rotate down into parallel passé, and then return to turned out passé position
- 5.) Perform for 10 reps
- 6.) Then repeat on other side



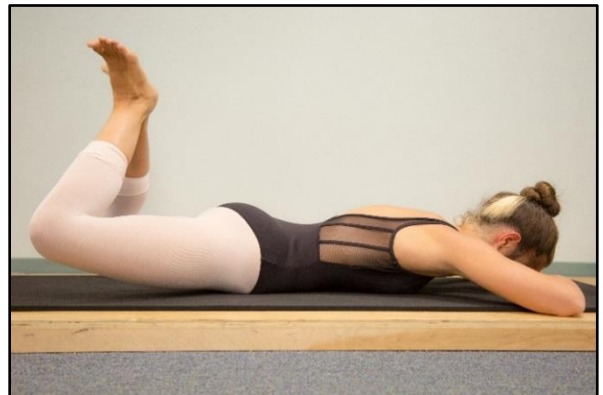
## Plié Heel Squeezes 'Frog Squeezes'

To improve: Hip strength, lower back stabilization, turnout, arabesque, leaps

- 1.) Laying on your stomach, widen the legs to be mat distance apart
- 2.) Bending at the knees until heels are touching
- 3.) Pressing both heels into one another, holding for 6 seconds, then rest
- 4.) Repeating this for 10-12 repetitions



### Progression: Frog Lifts



Advanced progression: lift thighs off the floor by squeezing the buttocks together as you press your heels together



## Bird-Dogs

To improve: back strength, balance, arabesqué

- 1.) Begin on hands and knees, place hands under shoulders and knees hip distance apart
- 2.) Keeping the back still, extend arm and opposite leg away from each other on the floor
- 3.) Lift arm and opposite leg, hold for 10 seconds, then return to start position
- 4.) Repeat 10x, then perform with opposite arm and leg



## Planks

To improve: core strength, arm strength, balance, port de bras

For each version of the planks below begin by holding as long as you can with correct posture and repeat 5 times. Gradually build up to 1 minute holds. When you can hold for 1 minute you may progress to the next level.

**Key points:** You should have a slight arch in your low back. Do not let your bottom sag towards the floor or stick up towards the ceiling. Do not drop your head, keep it in line with your spine.

### Level 1: Short Plank:

- 1.) Start off on your hands and knees with your hands directly underneath your shoulders and your knees directly underneath your hips. Keep a slight arch in your low back.
- 2.) Contract your abdominals and lift your knees 1 inch off the ground, without changing the position of your low back.





**Level 2: High plank:**

- 1.) Begin in the starting position above.
- 2.) Keeping your abdominals tight and a slight arch in your low back, place your feet, one at a time, out behind you for a high plank.



**Level 3: Plank on elbows:**

- 1.) Begin with your elbows directly below your shoulders and your forearms on the floor.
- 2.) Keeping your abdominals tight and a slight arch in your low back, place your feet, one at a time, out behind you to come into a plank on your elbows.



## Side Planks

To improve: shoulder strength, oblique abdominal strength & endurance, port de bras, développé

For each version of the side plank below hold as long as you can with proper form and repeat 5 times. Gradually build up to 1 minute holds. Progress to the next level when you can easily perform 1 minute hold of the easier version.

### Level 1:

- 1.) Begin laying on your side with your elbow directly under your shoulder and your bottom knee bent and your top knee straight.
- 2.) Keep your body in a straight line and lift your hips off the ground.
- 3.) To make this harder, try lifting your top leg up slightly, squeezing your buttocks. Keep your leg slightly behind your body. Do not let it move in front of your body. Repeat this while you hold.



### Level 2:

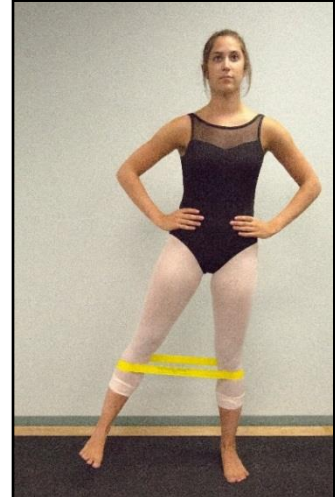
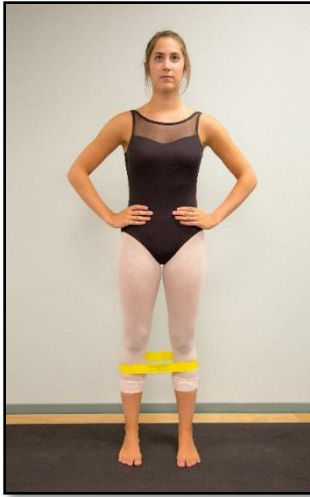
- 1.) Begin by laying on your side with your elbow directly under your shoulder and both legs straight.
- 2.) Push your hips up off the ground to come into a full side plank. Keep your body straight.
- 3.) To make this harder drop your hips 3 inches and raise them 3 inches. Repeat this while you hold.



### Side-stepping

To improve: hip strength and stability, balance, développé

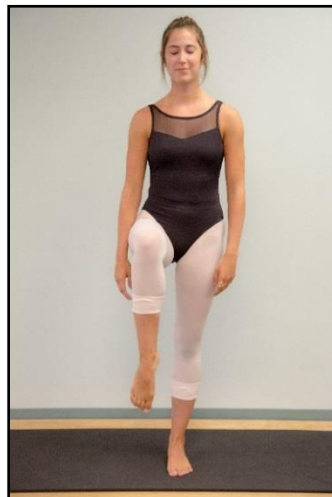
- 1.) Stand in parallel with your knees straight, but not locked, and an exercise band around your ankles.
- 2.) Tighten your abdominals to keep your pelvis still.
- 3.) Keeping your hips level and without letting your trunk sway side to side, take a step out to the side. Focus on squeezing your buttocks muscles on both legs. If you cannot keep proper alignment, do this with the band around your thighs instead of ankles.
- 4.) Take 10 steps in one direction, then 10 in the other. Repeat this 3-5 times.



### Single Leg Stance:

To improve: balance, hip and ankle stability, relevé, pointe work

- 1.) Stand on one leg in parallel coupe.
- 2.) Close your eyes and balance as long as you can, using your fingertips on the barré as needed.
- 3.) Try to hold for 1 minute. Do 3-5 times



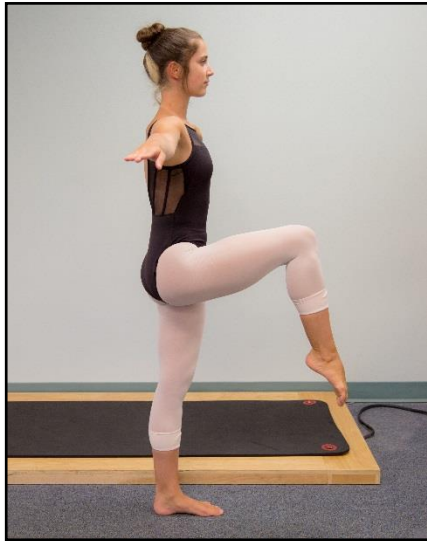
Advanced progression:

- 1.) Standing in parallel passé
- 2.) Turned out coupe
- 3.) Turned out passé

## Airplanes

To improve: balance, turns, arabesque, pointe work

- 1.) Standing on one leg with foot parallel
- 2.) Pivoting at the hip to extend opposite leg behind until trunk is parallel to the ground
- 3.) Hip to remain square
- 4.) Then return to a standing position on same one leg standing position
- 5.) Repeat 5x, then repeat on other side



To advance this exercise, perform 8 pliés when you are in the airplane position, repeat 3 times on each leg (see below)



## Elastic Band Relevés

To improve: ankle stability, relevés, jumps, pointe work

- 1.) Tie an elastic exercise band to a stationary object, making a loop.
- 2.) Step into the band with one foot and face the band standing in parallel.
- 3.) Relevé, maintaining proper alignment and control. Perform 5 times.
- 4.) Turn 90 degrees to the right and perform 5 more relevés



- 5.) Continue until you have performed the relevés facing 4 different directions



Progress this exercise by performing in turnout: 1<sup>st</sup> position, and then progress to 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> positions



## Cardiovascular Conditioning

Taking your heart rate:

Feel your pulse at the thumb side of your wrist or at your neck. Count the number of pulses you feel for 30 seconds and multiply this number by 2. This is your heart rate measured in beats per minute (bpm). Consider purchasing a heart rate monitor, Fitbit, or other exercise tracker that includes heart rate monitoring. You may also use the heart rate monitors that are on stationary bikes, treadmills, etc., but they may be less accurate.

Optimal cardiovascular training range in **60-80% of your heart rate maximum** (220- your age). To calculate your optimal training heart rate range:

.6\*(220-your age) is the low end of the range

.8\*(220-your age) is the high end of the range

Calculate your training heart rate range, and perform a **cardiovascular training activity for 20-40 minutes, 3-5 times a week**. Cardiovascular training activities include: biking, walking, jogging, elliptical and swimming. Monitor your heart rate and try to keep it within your training range. To increase your heart rate: walk/ride bike/swim faster, add an incline, add resistance or carry hand weights. Do the opposite to decrease the heart rate.

- Note: working at a heart rate higher than your range is not better! Stay in your range for a longer period of time to improve your fitness.
- If you cannot take your heart rate, a good rule of thumb is you should be working out hard enough that you cannot sing, but not so hard that you cannot talk.

## Proper Stretching Technique

When you stretch a muscle it becomes less strong for a period of time. Therefore stretching should be minimal before and during class, because you need your muscles to stay strong for you to dance. To increase flexibility, stretches should be done after class when you are warm. Stretches should be held in one position (no bouncing!) and controlled by the dancer (not by another person). Stretches should be held for 30 seconds to a minute and performed three to five times. Always stretch both sides equally. We find that most dancers stretch a lot and do not do enough strengthening. This excessive flexibility without enough strength and control can lead to injury. Therefore this packet focuses on important strength, control and balance exercises and not stretching.

*Special Thanks to dancer, Susie Wopat photographed in this packet.*