



Erin Myers

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Does Ballet Increase Your Risk of Scoliosis?

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As a dancer, you probably know someone with scoliosis or, if you're like me, you might even have it yourself.

What you may not know is that certain lifestyle factors can increase your likelihood of developing the condition, and according to a recent study published in *The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, classical ballet training is one of them. When ballet is combined with a low body mass index, that risk increases even more.

"Scoliosis develops amongst females at precisely the time that girls begin seriously training in ballet," says Dr. Leon Scott, an assistant professor of Clinical Orthopedics & Rehabilitation for Vanderbilt University Medical Center and a former team physician for Boston Ballet. "In my experience, how ballet students are taught to hold their spines in class is opposite of the spine's natural curves. Starting ballet at a younger age, increased frequency of ballet training and increased duration of ballet are associated with an increased risk for developing the abnormal curvature seen in scoliosis."

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I was classically trained in ballet when I was young, and diagnosed with scoliosis when I was a teenager. I went on to dance with the Radio City Rockettes until the pain caused by my scoliosis became too much to bear, and am now a certified Pilates teacher who specializes in working with scoliotic clients. Dr. Scott and I came up with five tips to help decrease your risk:

1. Proactively monitor any changes in your body, especially if you're between 10 to 18 years old. Is one shoulder higher than the other? Does one side of your ribcage protrude forward? Does one hip stick out more to the side than the other? These misalignments could indicate scoliosis, so make an appointment with your doctor ASAP if you notice them. Ballet teachers: Make note of consistent body misalignments that students have trouble correcting.
2. Ask for a scoliosis screening during your annual medical exams.
3. Build up the core strength to support the spinal positions needed for ballet. Exercises with props, such as an overball or a foam roller, work well because they force you to find a neutral balance point for your spine and pelvis.
4. Watch your body mass index (BMI). Dancers with a low BMI, particularly pre-teens and teenagers, can inadvertently delay their first menstruation. This makes the body more susceptible to scoliosis, which is a hormonal and neurological condition.
5. If a family member has scoliosis, be diligent about looking for changes in your body. Scoliosis can often be passed down genetically.

And if you are diagnosed with scoliosis, don't panic! [It doesn't have to mean the end of your dancing career.](#) There are many ways to successfully manage scoliosis that don't involve surgery.