



RETURN TO DANCE SAFELY

The aim of this document is to provide a simple yet effective way to apply scientific loading principles and research to your dance studio so that your dancers can return to dance in a safe and sustainable way.

THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS

Considerations for returning to the studio

Dancer questionnaire

Dancer profile

Principles for increasing load and example timeframes of loading principles and returning to full activities

Frequently asked questions



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RETURNING TO THE STUDIO

1 DANCER QUESTIONNAIRE

Utilise the attached questionnaire (or design your own) to ascertain what the dancer has actually been doing.

Accurate information helps understand where their bodies are currently.

2 DANCE SPECIFIC BASELINE PROFILE

Utilise the attached profile (or design your own) that incorporates basic dance fundamentals to determine current physical level.

3 CHECK IN

Check in with your dancers to determine how they are feeling. Are they experiencing any concerns? What can you do to support them?

4 GRADUATED APPROACH TO DANCE AND TRAINING IN THE STUDIO

Utilise loading and neuromuscular / motor skill learning principles, and strength training principles to load the dancer appropriately



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DANCER ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please see the example file attached that may be used in your studio.

Please ask your students to fill out this questionnaire so that you are able to gauge the amount and quality of participation in the online classes.

There are no incorrect answers, this is only used as an idea and it is recommended that students are not reprimanded if their answers are not exactly in line with the studio's ideals as this time has been challenging for all and the social and home situation of any student shouldn't be judged.



DANCER BASELINE PROFILE

Please see the example file attached that may be used in your studio.

This profile is an easy and fun way to objectively gauge the basic fitness level of your students when they return to the studio.

There are many aspects that can be assessed with these types of profiles, however, when completing these profiles simple and easy is often the most effective.

This profile could be completed in the first half of their first class, or first day, back in the studio.

How to complete:

- a. Students complete with a partner
- b. Partner can count or time the repetitions
- c. Partner can provide feedback for student
- d. Enter the results with a basic comment in the column
- e. To be completed at six and 12 weeks after the initial session to gauge objective improvement over time



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PRINCIPLES FOR INCREASING DANCE LOAD

When increasing dance load, there are four basic principles to consider

Volume (amount performed)

The numbers of activity or skill

For example, increasing the number and sets of sautés

Duration

The time that an activity or skill is performed for

For example, increasing the time taken by petite allegro or the jumping part of class

Intensity

The rate of work for an activity or skill

For example, increasing timing for jumps from single time to double time

Intervals

The rest time between repeated bouts of an activity, skill or training session

For example, decreasing the rest time between sets of sautés, or, decreasing break times between consecutive classes

The long period of rest or relative rest (compared to the pre-COVID-19 training levels), means that the dancer's body will have lost strength, decreased condition and will have a decrease in skill or technical level. Although many students have been completing their classes online, research has shown that the effort in participation in online classes is less than if they were in class in person and thus, the fitness and strength levels will vary between students.

Therefore, it is important upon return to training that dancers gradually increase the parameters of load; volume of training, duration, intensity and intervals. Increasing load too quickly doesn't allow the body to fully recover and research has suggested that an increase in load by **20-30% each phase** is sustainable for the body.



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PRINCIPLES FOR INCREASING DANCE LOAD

THE ACQUISITION OF SKILL

Physiologically, it will take six weeks for the brain and body to gain skill and coordination levels, commonly called neuromuscular skill.

Therefore, during the first six weeks after the return to the studio, the skills need to be re-acquired so that they reach their pre-COVID-19 levels.

After the first six weeks, more complex skills and choreography can be reintroduced.

At approximately 12 weeks, this is where brand new skills and a progression of complex skills can be layered into training.

Upon returning to the studio, the skill level of the dancer does depend on how much and the quality of the training they were able to achieve whilst completing classes from home. Many students may have been completing their online classes in a smaller space, and so have been unable to complete the travelling or jumping aspects of their classes at a level that could maintain their pre-COVID-19 skill.

For example, if the dancer was working on chassé en tournant just prior to studio closing, during the first six weeks, classes would start reintroducing chassé only for safety and skill acquisition, once this has been achieved, chassé en tournant can be reintroduced. From six weeks, the student would solidify chassé en tournant and then, from approximately 12 weeks, further new skills can be added to this step. For dance styles other than ballet, please insert a comparable travelling step or skill, in place of chassé en tournant.



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PRINCIPLES FOR INCREASING DANCE LOAD

TIMETABLING

Organising the dance timetable for recreational, full time or part time dancers is always challenging. During the first six weeks, it is recommended that students who have consecutive classes (most commonly in part time or full time courses) have their timetable adjusted (or class repertoire adjusted) to provide classes that have a decreased intensity. In these first six weeks, an increased break between classes is also useful to allow for recovery and adaptation.

For example, a full time student has 6 hours of dancing during the day of various classes and styles with a 45 minute lunch break in the middle. During the first six weeks, timetable in conditioning classes (core, strength, not jumping or stretching) or floor barre during the middle of each morning or afternoon sessions to allow for recovery. Alternatively, create shorter classes by approximately 15-20 minutes to allow for recovery between classes (decreasing overall duration of dancing during the day).

SUMMARY OF LOADING AND SKILL

Loading and skill acquisition can be simplified into five broad phases.

Phases 1-3:

Are characterised by the re-acquisition of skill and increase in strength and endurance.

Classes may be shorter and repertoire adjusted to allow for a gradual increase in load.

Phases 4-5:

Are characterised by the reintroduction of more complex skills and increased intensity and duration of training. Training sessions aim to return to pre-COVID-19.

Through all of these phases, monitor the students for

- Quality of movement
- Ability to maintain technique
- Levels of exertion
- Focus and enjoyment



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PRINCIPLES FOR INCREASING DANCE LOAD

SUMMARY OF LOADING AND SKILL

Phase One 0- 2 weeks

- No new skills
- No jumping
- Building confidence, skill and coordination levels

Phase Two 2- 4 weeks

- Double leg jumps, gradual introduction of petite allegro or comparable skill
- No new skills, consolidating pre-COVID-19 skills
- Building strength, endurance in exercises with solid technique such as increasing repetitions of exercises and decreasing breaks between exercises in class

Phase Three 5-6 weeks

- Single leg jumps and gradual introduction of travelling
- jumping steps in petite allegro or comparable jumping skill
- No new skills, consolidating pre-COVID-19 skills
- Building strength, endurance in exercises with solid technique such as increasing repetitions of exercises and decreasing breaks between exercises in class

Phase Four 7 -12 weeks

- Gradual introduction of grande allegro and comparable jumps/skill
- Skills consolidated to pre-COVID-19 level but no new skills beyond pre-COVID-19 level
- Building strength, endurance and repetitions of exercises
- Return to full training hours and normal timetable.

Phase Five 12 + weeks

- Full training hours and repertoire
- Gradual introduction of new skills
- Continue to build repetitions, intensity and return to normal breaks between classes/sessions.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

My students are “fresh” after a break. Why can’t they get straight back into it?

Research has shown that after being bedridden for even one day, there are effects, such as weakness, that can last up to two weeks. The students have not been bedridden, however, the ability to train at the intensity and skill level is varied. Students have also had minimal incidental exercise and thus are overall deconditioned. Some students may have experienced a growth surge and therefore they will need to readjust their skill and coordination levels slowly. By returning to jumping and high intensity travelling steps without the strength and support required, the students have an increased risk of injury, in particular bony injuries and injuries that can occur near the insertions of tendons, most common in adolescents.

My students have already been jumping in online classes. Why can’t they get straight back into jumping?

The level and intensity of student participation in jumps sections of the online classes is difficult to gauge and therefore, it is recommended that a cautious gradual approach is taken. As we all know, dancers will get straight back into it in the studio at 150% and so ensuring that their technique and strength is up to it is paramount to minimise the risk of injury.

We have new choreography for concert work to be learnt. How can I integrate this in the initial phases?

Many studios have either Term 3 or Term 4 concert preparation work to complete. Generally, when learning choreography these classes may have decreased intensity as more time may be spent understanding the steps and style. Due to these factors, choreography classes can be reintroduced from phase 2 or 3 yet it is recommended that the skill or steps are not beyond the student’s pre-COVID-19 skill level.

My students were due to start pointe work when the studio had to close. When can the student return to pointe work?

Pointe work falls under a new skill in this case and therefore, it is important to not introduce this until the student is at pre-COVID-19 strength and skill level. Each student is different but it will be after approximately 12 weeks of training.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are there no set times or repetitions in the guidelines?

Each school and student has a different level, whether it be recreational or pre-professional. However, the principles of regaining strength and skill apply to all and can be adjusted to specifically relate to your school.

My students only participate twice a week, for two hours each session?

How do the above guidelines apply? For recreational dancers who participate in one or two sessions per week, returning to solid technique is especially important in the first 12 weeks. These students are more likely to have lost their coordination, skill level and condition as they are more “recreational”, therefore the guidelines still apply. They may return to their full hours (such as twice a week, two hours each time) from the beginning however, building their jumping and technique gradually and reviewing the basics from Term 1 is important. We recommend the classes initially having more technique, slightly longer rests and conditioning as they build back to their pre-COVID-19 levels. Use the baseline test in class to help students understand their levels of strength and fitness and how they progress over the weeks.

My recreational students do different repertoire during their two hour session in the evening, one hour tap and one hour jazz ballet. Aren't tap and jazz different and can't I progress them more quickly?

Yes, tap and jazz are different and the students learn different skills. If both the tap and jazz teacher use the loading principles of returning to the basics of the prior term, solidifying these skills and gradually building the numbers of repetitions in an exercise, then the students will steadily progress in each individual class without their bodies being overloaded.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

My students have lost flexibility and I want to increase their flexibility. What can we do?

During the first six weeks we recommend minimal “stretching sessions” for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the students may have had a growth surge and may have lost some flexibility as their muscles catch up with their bones, secondly stretching inhibits the ability for muscles to produce strength and power. We know that many of our students will have lost condition and it is important for the body to regain strength and neuromuscular control to support the joints and proprioception (coordination) when they first return to the studio.

If you are wanting to introduce stretching, we recommend that you do this at the end of the day and not prior to a class as the effects of stretching can impact their ability to complete their classes and may increase their risk of injury.

Research is now showing that mobility and flexibility can be achieved through strength and this is such an important factor when returning to the studio.

If you would like some more detailed information about stretching in general please check out the [IADMS guidelines](#).

If you have specific questions regarding loading, timetabling, recreational students versus pre-professional part time and full time students, please do not hesitate to contact any of the physiotherapists at Performance Medicine. We would love to help you and your students return to dancing safely.



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