

# Attention: Parents of Student-Athletes

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Inevitably, shortly after the start of every school year I get bombarded with several dance related injuries of the local junior high and high school dance teams. In most cases, these are related to repetitive trauma that the athlete ignored until the pain prevented her from participating in dance or at least significantly limited how much she could do.

Dance movements can be stressful on the body, especially in adolescent females whose bodies are undergoing significant physiological changes. Traumatic injuries and (more commonly) overuse injuries may occur due to lower extremity/ trunk weakness, a poor biomechanical relationship between hip, knee, and ankle joints, inadequate footwear and fatigue. The most common injuries are ankle sprains, knee joint problems, hamstring strains, groin strains, and pelvic/ sacroiliac joint problems.

Dancers have been shown (on average) to have less than 80% of the strength that other athletes of the same age and gender possess. If there are significant strength deficits in the body's powerhouse (trunk, buttock, and thigh muscles), this can lead to instability in the joints of the lower extremity and produce excessive strain on tendons and ligaments resulting in injury. If the athlete continues to dance through the pain without addressing the cause of the problem, the symptoms often will worsen and likely develop into a chronic problem that may take weeks or even months to resolve (that is, if the body is given adequate time to heal).

With this in mind, it is very important as the parent/ coach/ teacher of a young dancer to pay close attention to any signs that your athlete may be injured and take the appropriate steps to resolve the injury as quickly as possible. Of course, preventing injuries is always easier than resolving existing injuries. Having an orthopedic physical therapist perform a screening of your athlete (in any sport) to identify areas of weakness, mobility limitations and instability can greatly reduce the risk of injury by providing vital education and establishing an exercise/ stretching program to address these areas of concern. If your athlete is already injured, a physical therapist has the biomechanical knowledge to identify the source of the problem and develop a treatment plan specific to the athlete to allow him/ her to return to the desired activity as soon as possible. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to Everyone!