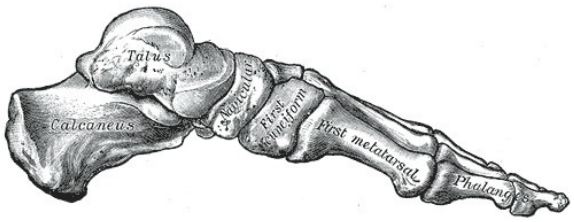
Pointe

IMPROVING POINTE RANGE

Many dancers struggle with achieving a nice line of their foot and ankle, and will often do anything to make it better! Unfortunately, many of the things that dancers do to try to improve their pointe range are potentially harmful. This includes things like stretching your feet under a piano, and using any kind of foot stretching device. In our opinion, pushing your body in the direction you want it to go is usually the slowest and most dangerous way of getting there. This approach also usually stretches what is already mobile, rather than targeting the elements that are actually restricting your range, so will often not give you the result you are after. Please read on to discover safer and far more effective ways of improving your pointe range!

The Anatomy of the Pointed Foot: The bony structure of the foot is amazing, and the more you understand it, the more you can manipulate it to get what you want! There are many different joints in the foot, ankle and lower leg that contribute to maximising your pointe range. Self massage and mobilisation techniques are great for freeing up old restrictions in your pointe range. You can start on this yourself, however, the best way to discover exactly where you need to focus is with a private session with your physiotherapist.



Self Massage: A simple series of specific massage techniques for the lower legs and feet can make a huge difference to your available pointe range. Often, if you have been trying really hard to pointe your feet, tension in the muscles and fascia may actually be blocking your range of motion. We suggest that you should spend at least 30 minutes a week for every 5 hours of dancing that you do for best results. Self massage should never feel painful, and your feet should always feel better afterwards than they did before.

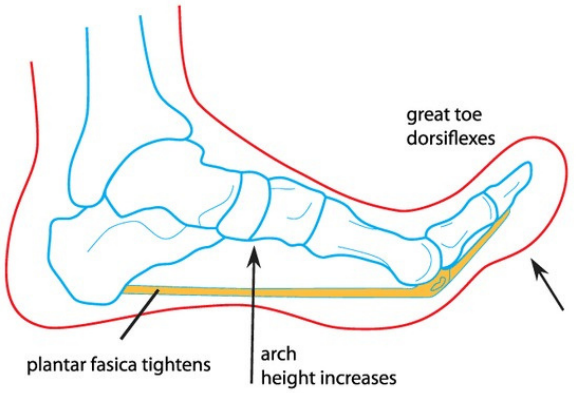
Mobilisation of the Mid and Rear Foot: Mobilisation of the mid and rear foot helps enormously in safely improving both pointe range and plié range. The foot is designed to move, but many dancers brace their feet because they are scared of rolling in. Encouraging and improving your range of pronation and supination will allow the joints of the
foot to move more naturally, and contribute to a lovely arched mid foot, as well as better shock absorption with jumps.

Fascial Mobilisers: Many people focus on stretching the ligaments to improve pointe range. This is a dangerous way of adding range, as the foot and ankle may become more unstable. However, if you review the anatomy of the foot looking instead at the Fascial Lines as described by Thomas Myers, you will discover that many of them end up in the foot. Careful mobilisation of the entire line, such as the Superficial Front Line shown on the right, can help open out your pointe range in a lovely, healthy way.

Specific Timing of the Complete Calf Complex: Everyone knows that you need strong calf muscles to make the most of your pointe range, but few actually know about the specific timing of each one. Exercises specifically targeting your Gastrocnemius, Soleus, Tibialis Posterior and Peroneals can be very helpful in creating strength and control without stiffness in the foot and ankle. Many people overuse the extrinsic muscles of the foot to brace the inner ankle in an attempt to stop rolling in. Unfortunately this then makes them too stiff and fatigued to be used when pointing the foot. Talk to your physio about which muscles you specifically need to work on.

Finding The Foot Intrinsics: Learning how to isolate and then integrate the intrinsic foot muscles into how you point the foot can really help shape the front of the foot. This especially important in pointe work to shape the tip of the shoe. Developing strength in the forefoot can also help keep the back of the ankle free as the extrinsic foot muscle tendons are offloaded.

Walking In Parallel: Many dancers do not realise that walking in turnout can actually restrict their pointe range. Walking in turnout forces the first metatarsal into the opposite direction to that which is needed for optimal pointe range! Learning how the foot should move during normal walking can make an enormous difference in the mobility of your feet. Walking in parallel helps facilitate the windlass mechanism that helps shape your arch over time.



Find out more:
How to Improve your Pointe Range Without a Foot Stretcher