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ISSN 1751-9470

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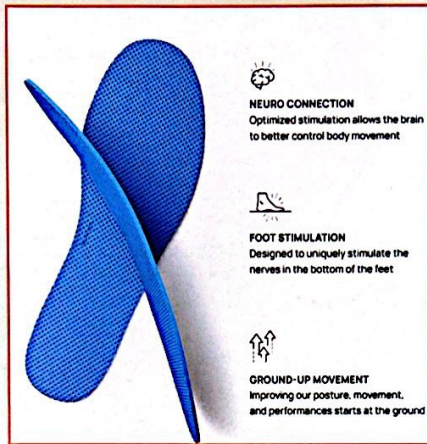
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12 Recovery Tools to Help You

When it comes to taking care of your dancing feet, Dr. Carrie Skony, a Certified Chiropractic Sports Physician® & Dance Medicine Specialist, knows just what to do! Check out her remarkable tips and tools for helping your feet recover after a long dance session.

1. Massage ball – A massage ball on the bottom of the foot can be a quick way to improve recovery. Add moderate pressure to the ball placed in the arch of your foot while sitting or standing and roll the ball around into the soft areas of your foot. Avoid pressing directly on the base of the heel or under the big toe as those can be irritating locations. Massage balls mobilise the intrinsic muscles of the foot that create your arch and point your toes. They also help mobilise fascial layers, reducing restriction in the foot. A hard lacrosse ball works, but I prefer a spiky massage ball because of the additional neurologic input it gives to your brain, stimulating a deeper response for recovery.



strength and control, and they form a very important connection to the brain. We can strengthen that brain-foot connection when those nerves are stimulated consistently. I specifically recommend Naboso®-brand proprioceptive insole inserts because of their patent-pending material designed specifically to stimulate the nerve fibres in your foot. When your feet are cramped into dance shoes all day, you can deactivate the communication between your foot and brain. By adding a proprioceptive insole to your shoes outside of dance, you can stimulate those nerves as you recover from training with the goal of reduced pain, improved postural control, and overall improved intrinsic foot function just by walking around. AND they feel amazing on your feet! They are designed to fit into most everyday shoes and may work best when worn daily.

toe separators as part of your recovery process. Separators slide onto your toes to align your feet into their natural position, with the toes 'splayed'. Many dancers find it very hard to actively spread their toes apart, and they have significant restrictions in the muscles between their metatarsals (long bones in the foot). Toe separators can help relax these restrictions while you wear them, which ultimately will improve foot mobility, intrinsic foot strength, and can reduce the risk of injuries like bunions and stress fractures in the long term. I like Naboso®-brand Splay or Correct Toes®, but there are other brands. I recommend putting them on after dance and starting by wearing them one or two hours a day while barefoot. They can be worn at rest or while you're up moving around. I even have dancers do their rehab or strengthening exercises while wearing them to optimise the foot position and activation of the foot muscles.

Note: **Most conventional socks and shoes do not allow enough room for the toes to splay appropriately, so plan to wear your separators barefoot, not with shoes.**

3. Gel toe separators – The nature of the Irish Dance shoe is often to compress and taper the toes, sometimes even curling them under in the process. This position limits your ability to use the important intrinsic muscles of the foot – the ones responsible for pointing your toes and creating an arch. A great way to recover from that is to use gel

2. Naboso® insole inserts – The bottom of the foot contains thousands of nerve endings that can be stimulated by touch, pressure, temperature and stretch. These nerves are responsible for our balance,



**ACTIVATE
RELEASE
SPLAY**

Your Dancing Feet

- 4. Interlace fingers/singer threading** – If you don't have toe separators, you can create some of that same stretch and space by interlacing your fingers between your toes and gently mobilising your toes for a few minutes after dance. It may provide you some immediate relief. You can also use a little lotion on the top of your foot and gently massage lengthways between your metatarsal bones to help mobilise the foot.



- 5. Toe stretch** – Another great way to recover from restricted shoes is by stretching into a common yoga stretch called the 'Toe Stretch'. In this stretch, you kneel on the floor and sit back on your heels with your toes tucked under, so you feel the stretch on the bottom of the feet and into the toes. This is wonderful for lengthening the toe flexors that are often overworked in Irish Dance. This can be a challenging position so remember to start small and breathe. You can deepen the stretch or hold it for longer as you get better at it. Start with 20 seconds and try to work up to one or two minutes with practice. It's



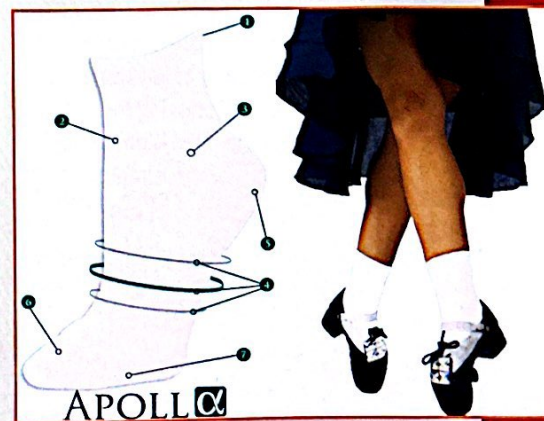
important to not push through any pain, so discontinue if this pose reproduces specific pain in your toe joints or bottom of the foot.

- 6. Street shoes** – Remember to consider what you put on your feet outside of dance. Your street shoes should be less restrictive than your dance shoes and allow plenty of room for your toes to stretch and splay specifically. Some dancers prefer soft inserts for comfort as part of their recovery and some benefit from a little more arch support. Arch support is not always required and can even be a hindrance to overall foot function. But all dancers should look for shoes that don't taper at the toes. Trendy styles are often narrow at the toes and ball of the foot, and/or too rigid to allow proper movement through the foot. When your shoe is off your foot, check to see if you can bend it. It should bend easily through the middle and front of the shoe to mimic the mobility your foot needs when walking. Also, try the shoe liner test. Take out the insole that comes with your shoe and stand on it while barefoot. Your toes should gently separate while standing and they should ideally fit within the size of the shoe liner. If they overhang on either side, your shoe is likely too

restrictive and tapered for ideal foot function and recovery from dance.



- 7. Compression socks** – Compression socks have been reimagined to improve recovery of athletes' feet. They offer graduated compression and support starting at the toes and arch and work up through the calf. This helps reduce pain and inflammation, provide relief and support, and improve overall circulation in the foot and ankle. I recommend Apolla™-brand performance socks that come in different styles and colours and have patented technology that was originally designed specifically for dancers.



- 8. Recovery Boots** – Recovery boots have become a popular way to rapidly improve leg soreness and function after intense →

activity. These boots fit from the hip all the way down to the feet and have separate chambers that fill up with air to pre-determined amounts of pressure to gradually pump fluid and blood away from your feet and up to your heart. They generally produce rapid results in reduction of pain, creating a feeling of 'fresh legs' and likely will help reduce your overall recovery time.



NormaTec Pulse 2.0 Leg and Hip Recovery System for Athlete Lower Body Recovery Patented Dynamic Compression Massage Technology
Size: Standard

9. Contrast baths – Sticking your feet in an ice bath can feel very relieving after a long day of rehearsals and can help reduce inflammation. However, I prefer to recommend a contrast bath because of the way it promotes overall increased blood flow. Contrast foot baths are the process of alternating hot water and ice water to influence blood flow into the foot. I recommend putting your feet in bath water for four minutes, above your ankle, then switch and put them in an ice bath bucket for one minute. Repeat this process four times in a row, ending with ice. This way you are creating alternating vasodilation and vasoconstriction which is a more effective way of reducing inflammation and of bringing fresh nutrients and oxygenated blood cells to any damaged tissues for improved healing.



Photo: Ammentorp at Dreamstime.com

10. Epsom salts – Magnesium is a wonderful mineral with many health benefits, but is widely known for its often-reported effects of relieving muscle pain. Try soaking those tired feet in a warm bath with one or two cups of dissolved Epsom salts for 15–20 minutes to help reduce the muscle tension, inflammation and pain in the feet after a long day of dance.

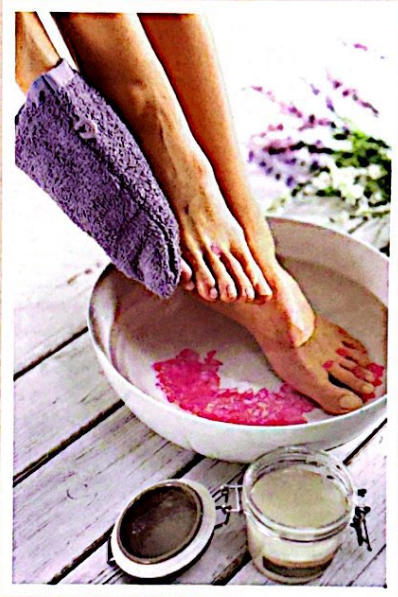


Photo: Robertrzybyysz at Dreamstime.com

11. Hydration – Don't forget hydration! Our bodies are made of approximately 60% water. Well-hydrated bodies have improved muscle activity, improved joint function and improved elasticity in tendons and fascia. You can proactively improve your recovery from activity by starting with a well-hydrated body. Aim for approximately half your bodyweight in ounces per day (120lb dancer = 60oz of water) as a baseline daily amount.



Add 16oz of water per hour of sweating or intense training. A dehydrated body is more likely to experience muscle cramping, muscle soreness and prolonged recovery.

12. Massage creams, arnica, heat, CBD – Some topical creams may be beneficial for improving soreness in the feet. Consider analgesic massage creams like Biofreeze, Tiger balm or IcyHot for temporary relief from soreness. Arnica gel is a homeopathic anti-inflammatory which can be found in gel form for massaging into muscles and works effectively. Also, CBD lotions have recently been touted for their pain relieving and anti-inflammatory effects and produce nice results. If you have prolonged or recurring pain in your foot that does not improve with recovery efforts or is either getting worse or interfering with your activities, make sure to have it evaluated by a qualified physician who understands dance injuries. Foot and ankle injuries are very common in Irish Dance and identifying them early will prevent further injury and reduce any time lost from dance. **IDM**



Photo: Amazon.com

If you want more help with taking care of your dancing feet, check out drcarrieskony.com or [@drcarrieskony](https://twitter.com/drcarrieskony) to find out how she can assist your feet recover after a long dance session.