

How to Strengthen Your Toe Point



By Judy Fisk

A strong toe point improves your leg line.

If you are a die-hard dancer, you know the look of your feet can make or break your performance. The same holds true for your fellow Nesties who compete in gymnastics, diving and synchronized swimming. You would all gladly sacrifice a limb for a stronger, prettier toe point. Even if your technique is top notch, audiences and judges want to see a beautifully curved foot at the end of your leg line and they will sigh -- sometimes audibly -- if it's not there. Give the critics what they want. Incorporate foot exercises in your overall conditioning program to strengthen your toe point, improve foot function and boost your performance quality.

Warm up your feet and ankles before you get to the heart of your workout. Take off your shoes and walk or prance around the room for three to five minutes to loosen up your ankles and wake up the muscles of your feet and toes. Place one hand on a wall for support, raise your right foot off the floor slightly and do a set of ankle circles, rotating the foot 10 to 15 times to the right and then left. Repeat with your left foot. Better yet, "write" the letters of the alphabet in the air with your big toe. Starting with your right foot, work your way from A to Z and then repeat with your left foot.

Work the tiny intrinsic foot muscles -- the interossei and lumbricals -- that support your arches and stabilize your toes. Sit on a chair with your feet on the floor in front of you. Pressing the toes of your right foot into the floor, draw the ball of the foot toward your heel. Visualize a balloon slowly expanding under your foot, pushing the arch upward. If you have difficulty isolating the arch, place a hand towel on the floor near your feet and use the toes and ball of the foot to grab the towel and pull it toward you. Alternatively, scatter a variety of small objects -- marbles, crayons, a balled-up pair of socks -- on the floor. Pick up the items with one foot and drop them a foot or so away. Whatever exercise variation you choose, shoot for eight to 12 reps on each foot.

Bring a resistance band into the mix. A strong toe point starts with solid plantar flexing, or extension of your foot away from your shin. Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you. Loop a flat, moderate-level resistance band around the ball of your right foot and pull back on the ends of the band to remove slack. Extend the right ankle, moving the foot and toes away from your shin. Hold for a count of two and then slowly dorsiflex the foot, moving the forefoot back toward your shin. Complete eight to 12 reps for a total of one to three sets before switching to your left foot.



Stay seated in a pike position for a "toe sit-up" exercise. Extend your right ankle, foot and toes so that the foot is fully pointed away from the shin. Keeping the ankle and bony instep still, flex and extend just the toes. Flex the toes toward the ceiling, hold briefly and then extend the toes away from you. Repeat eight to 12 times slowly and then switch to your left foot. For greater intensity, loop a resistance band around the bottoms of your toes, pull back on the ends and press the toes into the band as you extend them.



Sign up for a ballet class and attend faithfully. Nothing beats practicing the dégagé step, tendu, releve, or frappe ballet moves -- basic ballet exercises that work the foot and ankle -- for developing stronger, more beautiful, more functional feet. Make the most of your time at the barre, consciously articulating through all parts of your feet to improve your toe point

<h3>MARBLE PICK-UP</h3> <p>Pick up 20 marbles off the floor with your toes and place each marble individually into a bucket or pan. Repeat this daily.</p> <p>1 2</p> <p>FootSmart</p>	<h3>TOWEL CURLS</h3> <p>Curling your toes on the edge of a towel, scrunch the towel toward your body. This may be difficult at first, but with practice it will become much easier. When it does, place small weights on the towel to increase the resistance.</p> <p>1 2</p> <p>FootSmart</p>	<h3>TOE SPREAD</h3> <p>Rest the heels on the floor, curl the toes tight, then lift and spread the toes apart as far as they will go. Hold this position for a count of 10 seconds and repeat three times, twice daily.</p> <p>1. 2.</p>
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Tips

- Finish up your workout with a foot massage to release tension and prevent cramping. Gently press your thumbs into the soles of your feet or roll the bottom of each foot over a golf ball or frozen water bottle.
- If you work your feet hard one day, take a full day to let them rest and recover. On off days, focus your conditioning efforts on other body parts.
- Recognize that improving your toe point is a process. Over time, as your ankles, feet and toes become stronger, a solid toe point should become second nature.

Warnings

- Avoid exercises that cause pinching, cramping or pain anywhere in the foot or ankle. Learn to distinguish between the feeling of normal, productive tension and outright pain.
- Stay away from mechanical contraptions and extreme foot exercises that your peers claim will improve your toe point. Some products and exercises -- such as shoving your toes under a door to forcibly increase the arch -- can cause serious, long-term damage to the bony structure of the foot.
- If you've injured any part of your foot or ankle in the past, speak to your doctor or physical therapist about the advisability of specific exercises.

About the Author

Judy Fisk has been writing professionally since 2011, specializing in fitness, recreation, culture and the arts. A certified fitness instructor with decades of dance training, she has taught older adults, teens and kids. She has written educational and fundraising material for several non-profit organizations and her work has appeared in numerous major online publications. Fisk holds a Bachelor of Arts in public and international affairs from Princeton University.

HEEL RAISE

This simple exercise helps strengthen the muscles around your ankles.

1 Place the balls of your feet (with toes pointing straight) on a wood block, step or large book.



2 Allow your heels to slowly drop down and maintain this position for five seconds.

3 Raise your heels as high as you can and maintain this position for three seconds.



Inward and outward

Do the same exercise, only with the toes pointed inward toward each other, then with the toes pointed outward away from each other.

