

CHAPTER THREE

Kinesthetic Awareness: Heightening Perception of Origins of Movement

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Because the fundamentals of movement are ingrained into the body's "memory," each exercise in every lesson you take should be seen as an opportunity to increase the acuity of your body awareness and control techniques.

Pointing Your Toes

In ballet, the command to “point your toes” is really inaccurate. The accurate command is to “point the foot” or extend the ankle joint straight down (plantar flexion) and then further extend the toes (not “crunch” as you did a moment ago in the previous exercise) in order to feel that you are stretching and lengthening the entire foot.



Fig. 3.50a Example of correct ankle and toe extension.



Fig. 3.50b Example of “crunched” toes.

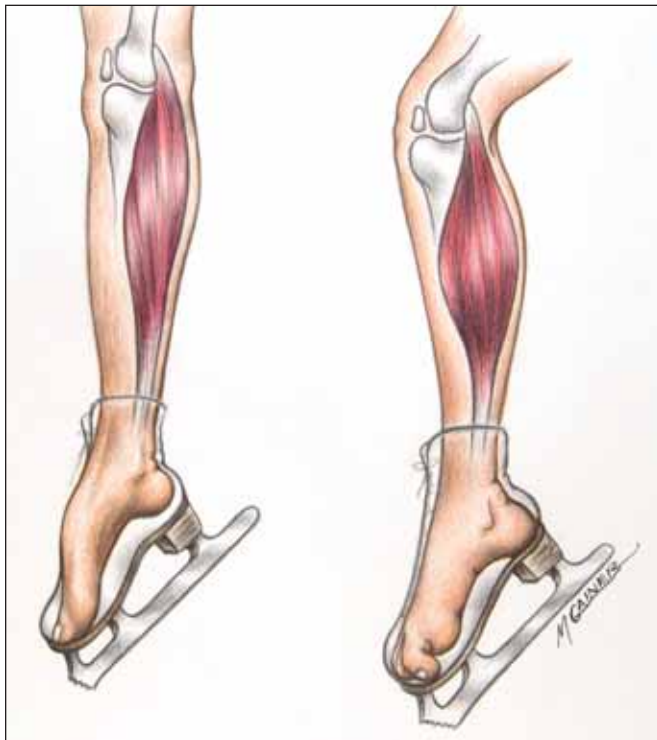


Fig. 3.50c When the toes are “crunched” the calf muscle shortens pulling the femur towards it. Extending and pointing the foot correctly allows the knee to straighten with ease.

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Crunched toes in a boot can cause foot and lower leg cramps and greatly increase the risk of injury. Crunched toes will also make it very difficult to straighten your knee as the calf muscle will be contracted. It is difficult enough to feel a pointed foot inside a skating boot, so I tell the skaters to push the ball of the foot and toes down into the floor of the skate until the heel begins to rise off the floor of the skate.



Fig. 3.50d

When helping your skaters to feel a pointed foot, have them start by sitting on the floor in a slight straddle. Ask them to extend the ankle forward and then put the palm of your hand under the ball of their foot. As you give resistance by pushing your hand gently upward tell them, "Keep your toes long and stretched and push down on my hand as hard as you can."

Exercise 16, Part 1: Pointing from the Ankles

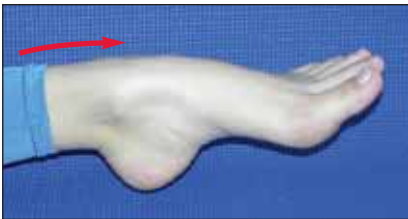


Fig. 3.51a Extend the foot from the ankle (plantar flexion) as far as you can but keep the toes relaxed. Pay particular attention to the calf muscle and the tibialis anterior.

Pulse the ankle extension several times in order to really feel the muscle action.



Fig. 3.51b Keep the foot strongly extended and flex the toes back (if you were standing on the balls of your feet this would be called "half" or "demi-pointe") and hold.



Fig. 3.51c Then strongly stretch and extend the toes forward to point the entire foot.

Analyze:

- Did you feel the action of the muscles as you pulsed the extension? This is what is occurring in your lower leg during a jump takeoff.
- As you strongly "pointed" the entire foot, including the toes, did you feel the greater contraction of the calf muscle as well as greater extension in the tibialis anterior? As we saw earlier, this fine motor action is a very important factor in being able to straighten the knee. It is also vital in obtaining full power in jump take-offs and in cushioning the impact to the entire leg on jump landings.