

# Dance – what is stamina



‘ What is stamina? Describe the distinctive way in which the body of a dancer with stamina functions. Discuss how stamina is developed, drawing on your own experience in the dance studio and elsewhere. ’ Stamina is the endurance and staying power of the muscles, heart and breathing. In order to maintain a high standard of performance and technique, stamina is needed as it ensures that the heart and lungs are able to get oxygen to the muscles through the blood, to enable them to function to their maximum capability. Stamina is both muscular and cardiovascular endurance.

Muscular endurance is the muscle’s ability to continue contracting over a given time. It can be developed by progressive overload, which also increases the muscle’s strength, and this also helps the endurance of the muscle. During a ballet class, when working on technique, the repetitive movements will improve muscular endurance. Cardiovascular endurance is the ability to continue aerobic respiration and exercise over time. During exercise the heart rate increases from its resting rate to its maximum rate. After exercise it then returns to its resting rate.

In a ballet class the heart is not usually at its maximum rate for long periods of time, for the exercises rarely exceed more than three or four minutes, and if doing a travelling sequence, a dancer would cross the floor once, or do an exercise once, then wait for others to do so before repeating on the other side. Therefore aerobic activity is not continued for long enough, so it is recommended that a dancer should do some other aerobic activity outside of the class, such as running in order to increase their aerobic fitness and overall stamina.

During exercise the breathing rate also increases. This is so that the oxygen is supplied to the muscles faster and the carbon dioxide is taken away quicker. Aerobic exercise increases the long-term endurance of the respiratory system, where anaerobic exercise increases the short-term endurance. Anaerobic activity is where the performance increases but the amount of oxygen consumed by the muscle does not. Here, an oxygen debt is built up, and the waste product lactic acid can only be in the muscle for so long before exhaustion, when the muscles can no longer contract.

Dance usually uses anaerobic activity, but in some pieces the dancer may have to do aerobic activity, as asked by the choreographer, and so must be prepared for this by having a suitable aerobic stamina. This can be increased by running, cycling, and swimming. Stamina can also be increased by a good warm-up and cool-down. The heart rate is raised in the warm-up, which helps to increase a dancer's stamina, whilst also aiding in injury prevention.

Stamina is a very important skill for a dancer to have, as it enables them to perform to their maximum for a longer period of time.