

Ausdance National

FACT SHEET

Burnout Prevention for Dancers

What this Fact Sheet covers

Recognising burnout, understanding who is most at risk, and practical strategies around exercise, recovery, nutrition and hydration to prevent and manage it.

Who is this for?

Dancers of all ages, levels and styles, and the teachers, studio owners and parents who support them.

Why this matters

Constant training without adequate rest puts stress on the body's ability to adapt, which can lead to fatigue, muscular weakness and frequent injuries. Burnout is not a sign of weakness — it is a physiological and psychological response to an unsustainable workload.

Recognising it early and taking action protects long-term health, wellbeing and enjoyment of dance.

Who Is susceptible to burnout?

Burnout can affect dancers of any gender, age, culture or level of competence. Those at higher risk include dancers who set very high standards for themselves, work in a group performance environment, or carry a high physical, Cultural¹ or psychological load throughout intensive rehearsal and performance schedules.

Recognising burnout: Signs and symptoms

Fatigue is the primary indicator. Other signs may include:

- Waking regularly with low vitality or persistent tiredness.
- Feelings of constant fatigue and inability to recover following intensive dancing.
- Inability to perform well during classes or performances.
- Increased susceptibility to injuries.
- Loss of desire and enthusiasm for dance.
- Loss of appetite and unintentional weight loss.
- Disturbed sleep, often with vivid dreams or nightmares.
- Excessive sweating.
- Increased need to visit the toilet at night.
- Increased anxiety, irritability or depression.

Fatigue is the number one indicator of burnout. If you or a student are consistently exhausted, take it seriously and seek advice from your GP or a relevant health professional.

¹ See First Nations Considerations

First Nations considerations

For First Nations dancers, the risk of burnout extends beyond the physical demands of training. Cultural load — the additional weight of Community obligations, Kinship responsibilities, Ceremonial duties and the emotional labour of navigating predominantly non-First Nations spaces with Cultural protocols in mind — contributes significantly to overall fatigue and wellbeing. A First Nations dancer who is also supporting extended family, attending Ceremony and/or Sorry Business/Sad News, managing Community obligations and representing their Culture in a Western dance setting is carrying a significantly higher total load than their non-Indigenous peers — even if their dance schedules are identical.

Teachers and studio owners should be aware that burnout in First Nations students may present differently or may be attributed by the student to external factors rather than the dance itself. A flexible, supportive approach to training loads — particularly around Culturally significant periods such as NAIDOC Week, Sorry Business/Sad News and Community or Family events — is responsive and ethical practice. Teachers should be equipped to recognise the signs and to refer to appropriate support, including Culturally specific services.

13YARN (13 92 76) is a 24/7 crisis support line staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If you are concerned about a First Nations student's mental health or wellbeing, this is one appropriate referral option alongside other support services.

When to be careful

Dancers can learn from athletes who use periodisation — alternating hard workouts with easier routines that have rest built in — as well as de-loading weeks and tapering (reducing training volume while maintaining intensity) prior to peak performance periods. These strategies help prevent overload and support long-term performance.

How to avoid burnout

Exercise and recovery

- Take a personal day for relaxation. 12–24 hours of reduced physical activity helps your body recover from intense exercise.
- Avoid working through serious illness or injury. A 'no pain, no gain' attitude can be harmful.
- After taking an extended break from training or performing, return to work gradually so your body can readjust to the intensity.
- Supplement your training with a varied fitness regime. Yoga, swimming and Pilates improve fitness in ways dance doesn't specifically target, and allow heavily loaded muscles to recover appropriately.
- Use stress management techniques such as 4-4 breathing, meditation, mindfulness, journaling, hot baths, sauna, massage or hydrotherapy, alongside plenty of good quality sleep.

Diet and nutrition

Ensure you are eating enough calories, spread across regular meals, to appropriately fuel workouts and performances. A balanced diet includes:

- Complex carbohydrates for energy.
- Proteins for muscle recovery.
- Healthy fats for regulating brain function and stabilising blood sugar.
- Key micronutrients including Vitamins C, D, E and Magnesium, which are essential for immune system function.

For practical guidance on food sources and balanced nutrition, refer to resources from the Australian Institute of Sport (ais.gov.au) and Dietitians Australia (dietitiansaustralia.org.au).

Hydration

- Hydrate consistently throughout the day — even if you don't feel thirsty, you are likely losing fluid during training and performance.
- Consider electrolyte-rich drinks such as coconut water around longer training sessions.
- Note that caffeine can worsen the effects of dehydration.

Further reading

Australian Institute of Sport — nutrition and recovery resources: ais.gov.au

Dietitians Australia: dietitiansaustralia.org.au

Safe Dance Practice — Quin E, Rafferty S, Tomlinson C. Human Kinetics, 2015.

Ausdance — Tired all the time: ausdance.org.au

Ausdance Child Safe Dance Practices: ausdance.org.au/articles/details/child-safe-dance

AIHW — Health and wellbeing of First Nations people: aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/indigenous-health-and-wellbeing

Creative Australia — Living Culture (arts and wellbeing): creative.gov.au/research/living-culture-first-nations-arts-participation-and-wellbeing

Reconciliation Australia — Reconciliation Action Plans: reconciliation.org.au

eSafety Commissioner — First Nations resources: esafety.gov.au

13YARN (24/7 crisis support for First Nations people): 13 92 76

Australian Public Service Commission — Cultural Load: apsc.gov.au

ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2022–23: abs.gov.au

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey 2023: abs.gov.au

This fact sheet provides general information only and is not a substitute for medical advice. If you are experiencing persistent fatigue or symptoms of burnout, seek advice from your GP or a relevant health professional.

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