

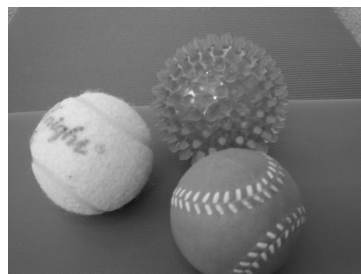


Releasing Your Lower Legs

You've been doing a lot of dancing and your lower legs are incredibly sore. Stretching and long hot baths do not seem to be working and you wish you had time and money for a massage.

Dancers frequently have to stop dancing due to lower leg injuries. In many cases this is due to overwork and not enough rest and release work.

A cheap and effective way of getting rid of your aches and pains is to use a tennis or massage ball to release those sore calves and shins, but firstly you will need to have a little understanding of how to apply this wonder tool.



Trigger Points

When working and exercising we are generally using the same muscles and movements, causing a degree of stress on the body's muscular system.

When muscle fibres are overactive and unable to relax and release from their contracted state you will find a trigger point. We commonly refer to this as a knot. The part of a muscle fiber that actually does the contracting is a microscopic unit called a sarcomere. Contraction occurs in a sarcomere when its two parts come together and interlock.

When a muscle is working, its sarcomeres act like tiny pumps, contracting and relaxing to circulate blood through the capillaries that supply their metabolic needs. When sarcomeres in a trigger point hold their contraction, blood flow essentially stops in the immediate area.

The resulting oxygen starvation and accumulation of the waste products of metabolism irritates the trigger point. The trigger point responds to this emergency by sending out pain signals.

Referred Pain

The defining symptom of a trigger point is referred pain. This means that trigger points may send their pain to another site in the body. In many cases the pain felt may not be at the place that hurts

Massage of the trigger point flushes the tissue and helps the trigger point's contracted sarcomeres begin to release. In dealing directly with the trigger point, massage is the safest, most natural, and effective form of pain therapy.

The techniques described in this document are safe and effective to use, but if symptoms persist you must seek medical attention as you may have an injury.

General rules when using a ball for release work

It will be painful. If it doesn't feel like 'good pain' then stop. You may have an injury.

Work up and down the muscle slowly and stop on any tender points for a bit longer as these may be trigger points. When you reach a trigger point it will be a deep pain. This is alright, stick with it. A trigger point will diminish in pain the longer you stay on the spot. Breathe fully and deeply as it will help to relax you and bring much needed oxygen to your muscles.

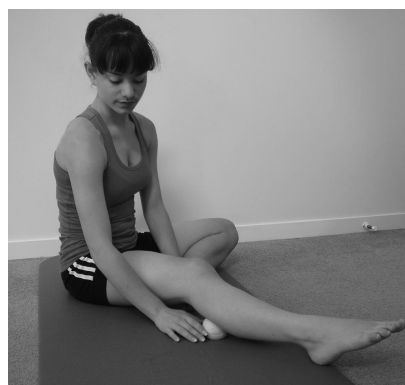
Give your muscles time to recover. It is not a good idea to release the muscle and then go to dance class. Release work is best done after strenuous physical activity, when you will have time to rest and heal.

Releasing your calves

The two main muscles at the back of your lower leg, are called the gastrocnemius and soleus.

Process:

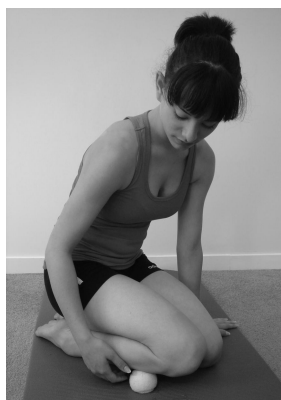
Sit comfortably on the floor with your back well supported and place the ball below the knee joint at the top centre of the lower leg. Place the other leg over the top to add more weight. After a few breaths move the ball slowly toward the outside of the calf and then the inside of the calf. Take the time to wait in each position for a few slow breaths.



Return the ball to the centre and move the ball down toward the heel a little. Repeat the process above until you reach the heel. If you find any really painful spots, stay there until it starts to release.

Releasing your shins

To release the muscles at the front of the lower leg you will need to kneel on the floor.



Process:

Place the ball below the knee joint at the top centre point. After a few breaths move the ball slowly toward the outside of the shin and then the inside. Take the time to wait in each position for a few slow breaths.

Return the ball to the centre and move the ball down toward the ankle a little. Repeat the process above until you reach the ankle. If you find any really painful spots, stay there until it starts to release.

Even if you do not find any trigger points you will still benefit from the release if your lower legs are too tight.

Photos: Tania Huddart
Model: Rebecca Lee

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