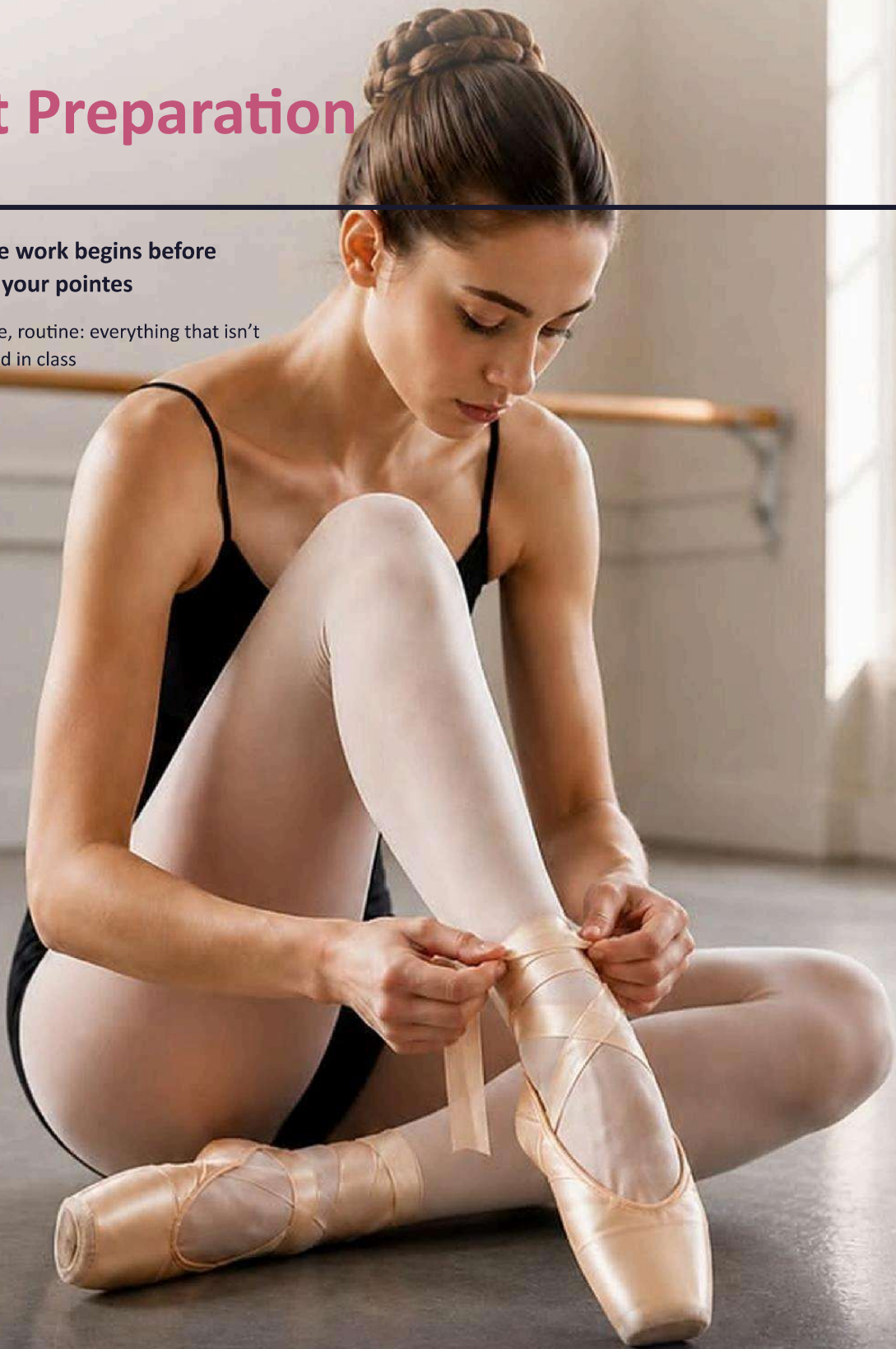


ALL THAT DANCE
GUIDE

Foot Preparation

**Because the work begins before
you put on your pointes**

Stretches, care, routine: everything that isn't
always covered in class



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A word from Virginie

“Getting ready for pointe doesn’t happen overnight. It starts with preparing your feet — sometimes months before your first pair.”

After 20 years as a professional dancer, then nine years advising dancers in the shop, I’ve seen the same thing hundreds of times: students who take the time to strengthen, gently stretch and care for their feet begin pointe work with far more enjoyment — and far fewer blisters.

This guide brings together the simple habits I wish I’d known when I started. Ten minutes a day is enough. The rest is consistency and patience.

VIRGINIE — FOUNDER OF ALL THAT DANCE

In this guide

01	Knowing your foot
02	Am I ready for pointe?
03	The 6 essential strengthening exercises
04	Stretching: gently, never forced
05	Foot care
06	My routine & tracking journal
07	Pain & your first fitting
08	Frequently asked questions

Important

This guide does not replace your teacher’s judgement or a healthcare professional’s advice. The green light for pointe always comes from your teacher. If it hurts, stop and ask for guidance.

For students Follow the routine, tick your journal and watch your progress week by week.	For parents Help build the habit: 10 minutes, in the evening, as a family — that’s perfect.	For teachers This guide can be shared freely with your students preparing for pointe.
--	---	---

Knowing your foot

On pointe, your entire body weight rests on a very small surface. Understanding how your foot works is already a step towards preparing it well.

26

bones in each foot

33

joints

100+

muscles, tendons & ligaments

A little useful vocabulary

Instep

The top of the foot. Its beautiful curve when pointed is built with strength, never forced.

Arch

The underside curve of the foot. It cushions, stabilises and supports you rising onto pointe.

Metatarsals

The long bones of the forefoot. You pass over them on demi-pointe, a key step in every rise.

Intrinsic muscles

The small hidden muscles inside the foot. They keep you from “sinking” into the shoe.

What’s your foot shape?

Egyptian foot	Greek foot	Square foot
The big toe is the longest, the others taper diagonally.	The second toe extends beyond the big toe.	The first toes are nearly the same length.
----- Pressure concentrates on the big toe: it often needs targeted padding.	----- This second toe takes more pressure: it’s factored into padding and fitting.	----- Weight spreads more evenly; box width becomes the key point.

DID YOU KNOW? No foot shape is “better” than another for pointe. Each simply has its own needs: the right model, and the right padding.

Am I ready for pointe?

There is no magic date. Teachers and dance-specialised physiotherapists look instead at a set of milestones. Check off the ones you already have.

- ☐ **Age & growth**
Generally not before 11–12 years old: the bones of the foot are still growing.
- ☐ **Experience**
About 3 to 4 years of regular ballet training, with several classes a week.
- ☐ **Single-leg rises**
15 to 25 rises in a row, knee straight, without the ankle rolling outward.
- ☐ **Balance**
30 seconds on one leg, in parallel, arms crossed, eyes closed.
- ☐ **Small single-leg jumps**
16 jumps in a row, stable hips, knee and foot stretched in the air.
- ☐ **A simple pirouette**
A turn en dehors with a clean retiré and a controlled landing.
- ☐ **Aligned foot**
A pointed foot that extends the leg, without “sickling” (turning inward).
- ☐ **Your teacher’s green light**
The one essential milestone. They know your work in class best.

Not there yet?

That’s completely normal.

Every body has its own pace. The exercises on the following pages are there to build these milestones, one by one, safely.

A word to parents

Buying pointe shoes “to motivate” or a size up “to grow into” doesn’t save time — quite the opposite. A pointe shoe must fit the foot perfectly.

Tip

Redo these tests once a month and note your results in the tracking journal. Seeing progress is hugely motivating!

The 6 essential exercises

Strong feet hold the shoe — not the other way around. Bare feet, in a calm space, focusing on quality rather than quantity.

1

The dome

Wakes up the intrinsic muscles that support the arch on pointe.

1. Seated, foot flat on the floor, toes long and relaxed.
2. Without curling your toes, “shorten” the foot: the arch lifts and forms a small dome.
3. Hold 5 seconds, then release gently.

2

Point-flex with a resistance band

Strengthens ankles and calves, and teaches a clean pass through demi-pointe.

1. Seated, legs straight, back tall. The band wraps around the forefoot, hold the ends.
2. Push first into demi-pointe (metatarsals), then point the toes.
3. Return slowly by unrolling: toes, demi-pointe, flex.

3

The towel

Builds toe strength and dexterity. Also great for younger dancers.

1. Seated, foot resting on a towel spread on the floor.
2. With your toes, scrunch the towel to pull it towards you, heel fixed.
3. Fun variation: pick up a scarf or small objects.

Dosage

10 times per foot

Common mistake: Clawing the floor with your toes. Keep them long and flat.

Dosage

10 to 20 reps per foot

Common mistake: “Sickling”. Keep the foot in line with the leg.

Dosage

2 to 3 passes per foot

Common mistake: Pulling with the whole leg. Only the foot should work.

Control & stability

4

Toe piano

Teaches you to separate the toes, for better weight distribution in the shoe.

1. Standing or seated, feet flat.
2. Lift only the big toe, the other four stay down.
3. Reverse: big toe down, the other four lift.

5

Parallel rises

The king of exercises: it builds the strength needed to rise and lower from pointe.

1. At the barre (or a chair back), feet parallel.
2. Rise by passing through demi-pointe, weight on the 1st and 2nd toes.
3. Lower slowly, over 3 counts, controlling every centimetre.

6

Single-leg balance

Trains proprioception: the foot's ability to constantly readjust.

1. Standing in parallel, lift one foot, standing knee straight but not locked.
2. Hold 30 seconds, hips and shoulders stable.
3. To progress: eyes closed, then on a cushion.

Dosage

10 times each way

Common mistake: It's hard at first — use your hands to help, it will come.

Dosage

3 × 10 on two feet, then progress to one leg

Common mistake: The ankle rolling outward. Aim for alignment.

Dosage

3 × 30 seconds per leg

Common mistake: Tip: do it while brushing your teeth — 4 minutes gained every day!

10'

THE DAILY MINI-CIRCUIT

Chain exercises 1, 2, 4 and 6: ten minutes, timed. Save the parallel rises (5) and the towel (3) for 3 to 4 sessions a week.

Stretching: gently, never forced

A beautiful instep is built with strength and flexibility together — never with force. Stretch after class, muscles warm, aiming for a pleasant sensation of stretch — never pain.

Calf, straight leg 2 × 30 s Facing a wall, hands resting on it, one leg stretched behind, heel flat on the floor. Gently move your hips forward until you feel the calf stretch.	Calf, bent knee 2 × 30 s Same position, but bend the back knee slightly while keeping the heel down. The stretch moves lower, into the calf and Achilles tendon.
Ball under the foot 1 min / foot Seated, roll a massage ball (or tennis ball) under the arch, from heel to toes. Gentle pressure: massage, don't crush.	Ankle alphabet 1× / foot Seated, leg straight, "write" the alphabet in the air with your big toe. Also great as a warm-up before class.
Toe fan 30 s / foot Seated, gently slide your fingers between your toes, as if holding hands with your foot. Make small, gentle circles with the ankle. Ideal in the evening, after a day in shoes.	

The 4 never-dos

What we see far too often — and never do

- Sliding the foot under furniture or a radiator to "gain instep".
- Letting someone press down on the top of the foot to stretch it.
- Using a foot stretcher without your teacher's or a physio's approval.
- Stretching cold, right before class: warm up first, stretch after.
- Wearing pointe shoes at home: risk of injury and of learning poor habits.

Why? Forcing it overstretches the ankle ligaments. The result: a less stable foot — exactly the opposite of what pointe work requires.

Pampering your feet

Well cared-for feet are feet that dance longer, with less discomfort. The right habits start now.

Nails ● Cut straight across, without rounding the corners (to avoid ingrown nails). ● Neither too long nor too short: they shouldn't extend past the toe tip. ● File the edges and trim a few days before class.	Calluses & hard skin ● A light, painless callus protects — keep it! ● If it thickens, gently file it with a soft file after showering. ● Never use a blade, corn cutter or any harsh peeling product.
Blisters ● Never tear off the skin: it protects the area underneath. ● Clean, disinfect, then protect with a “second skin” dressing. ● Red, warm, swollen, painful? See a pharmacist or doctor.	Hydration ● A foot cream in the evening, focusing on the heels. ● Avoid it right before class: the foot would slip inside the shoe. ● Remember to drink enough on dance days too.
Hygiene ● Dry thoroughly between the toes after showering. ● Take shoes and padding out of the bag as soon as you're home so they can air-dry. ● Clean tights and socks for every class.	Padding ● Gel or fabric toe pads, spacers, tape: every foot has its own needs. ● Too much padding means losing sensation: protect just enough. ● Never use numbing cream: pain is a useful signal.

RECOVERY After a busy day: a warm foot bath, legs raised for a few minutes, and comfortable shoes for the journey home.

My foot routine

Consistency matters far more than intensity. A simple routine to pin up in your room or slip into your dance bag.

Every day 10 minutes	Dome (10×) · Point-flex with band (10–20×) · Toe piano (10×) · Single-leg balance (3×30s)
3–4 times / week +5 minutes	Parallel rises (3×10) · The towel (2–3 passes)
Before class 5 minutes	Ankle alphabet · A few slow rises · Active point-flexes to warm the foot
After class 5 minutes	Calf stretches (2×30s) · Ball under the foot (1 min) · Shoes out of the bag
In the evening 2 minutes	Foot cream · Toe fan · A quick check of nails and any redness
Once a week 10 minutes	Nails trimmed straight if needed · Soft file on thick calluses · Check your padding

My 4-week journal

Tick off every routine completed

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Week 2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Week 3	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Week 4	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

My progress

Single-leg rises — week 1: _____ Single-leg rises — week 4: _____

Eyes-closed balance — week 1: _____ s Eyes-closed balance — week 4: _____ s

Discomfort, or a warning sign?

Starting pointe work takes a period of adjustment. Learning to tell the difference between normal fatigue and pain that should raise concern protects you for the long run.

Usually normal • Muscle fatigue in the calves or arch, gone within 24–48 hours. • Mild toe sensitivity during the first few sessions. • Slight redness that fades after class.	Stop and seek advice • Sharp, precise pain on a bone. • Pain that persists at rest or first thing in the morning. • Swelling, limping, pain in the Achilles tendon. • Ingrown nail, painful black nail, infected blister. Doctor, physiotherapist or podiatrist — ideally one experienced with dancers.
--	---

D-DAY

Preparing your first fitting

- | | |
|---|--|
| <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">1</div> <p>Book an appointment
A pointe fitting takes time: it's done calmly, without rushing.</p> | <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">2</div> <p>Bring your teacher's request
Some schools recommend a specific model or brand.</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">3</div> <p>Prefer late in the day
The foot is a little more swollen then, as it is at the end of class.</p> | <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">4</div> <p>Bring your usual tights
And your toe pads too, if you already use them.</p> |
| <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">5</div> <p>Trim nails a few days ahead
So you can feel the fitting without discomfort or irritation.</p> | <div style="background-color: #c0392b; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">6</div> <p>Don't sew anything too soon
Ribbons and elastics are sewn only after your teacher's approval.</p> |

AND THEN? Your feet change as you grow and train. Have the fit checked with every new pair, and replace pointe shoes that have gone soft: they no longer support the foot.

Your questions, our answers

Here are the questions we're asked most often in the shop, at the time of the first fitting. If yours isn't here, just ask us.

01 At what age can you start pointe work? Rarely before 11 or 12 years old: the bones of the foot are still growing. Beyond age, what really counts is years of practice and ankle strength. The green light always comes from your teacher.	02 How long does a pair of pointe shoes last? It depends on how often you dance. A student dancing once or twice a week will keep her pair for several months; a dancer training every day will go through them much faster. The unmistakable sign: the box softens, the foot "sinks," and you no longer feel support on the platform.
03 Do you need two pairs right away? No, one pair is enough to start. Later, alternating two pairs lets them dry out between classes: they keep their support longer.	04 How do you "break in" pointe shoes? Only the way your teacher asks for it: gradual work on the floor, in plié and rises, to soften the sole at the demi-pointe point. Never: the door, the hammer, hot water or bending them under a chair. These methods break down the support and damage the foot.
05 Where do you sew the ribbons and elastic? At the spot that matches your foot, and only once your teacher has approved the model. In the shop, we show you where and how to sew them: it's simple once you've seen it done.	06 Are toe pads essential? Strongly recommended, as long as they're the right fit: gel, fabric, spacers, small tapes. Protect sensitive areas without smothering the foot: too much padding means losing sensation and stability.
07 My pointe shoes hurt: is that normal? Discomfort and muscle fatigue during the first few sessions, yes. Sharp, precise pain, or pain that persists at rest, no: revisit the previous page and ask for advice.	08 Can you buy your first pair online? It's not advisable: a first pair should be chosen by trying it on your actual foot — length, width, box shape, vamp height. Once the model and size are confirmed at a fitting, reordering online becomes simple.

Have another question?

Write to us or drop by the shop: we take the time to answer, even before you buy your first pair. allthatdance.be/rdv

ALL THAT DANCE · POINTE FITTING

Your first fitting, prepared together

Every foot is unique.

In the shop, we take the time to observe yours, listen to your teacher's guidance, and have you try several models to find the pair — and the right padding — that truly suits you.

Book your fitting: allthatdance.be/rdv

SHOP

Rue Bois du Prince 89
7334 Hautrage (Saint-Ghislain)

E-SHOP

allthatdance.be

ALL THAT DANCE

THE WORK BEGINS BEFORE POINTE