

Ballet Academy Health Policy

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This document was developed in collaboration with the

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Preface

Dance education is in the midst of a transition. The objective of this Health Policy is to reassess the Ballet Academy's values regarding physical and mental well-being in order to align dance education with contemporary standards.

Professional ballet dancers are artistic athletes who require a high level of physical fitness and ballet-specific prerequisites. Their intensive training begins at an age when they are still physically and mentally developing. The Ballet Academy's training program must be in harmony with this complex developmental process. It is crucial that the physical demands placed on students in traditional classical dance training do not exceed the physiological and psychological limits of the students.

The Ballet Academy is committed to creating a supportive environment that prioritizes the physical and mental well-being of the students. Promoting a positive body image must also be embraced and demonstrated by all faculty members at the Ballet Academy.

The following are the key measures aimed at enabling students to reach their full potential in harmony with healthy physical and psychological development.

Minimum standards for weight development (Body Mass Index)

Weight gain is normal and necessary during childhood and adolescence. It is also a central indicator of appropriate growth and physical development. Therefore, the Ballet Academy adheres to minimum weight standards, which are standardized based on height, age and sex and are recorded for all students as Body Mass Index (BMI, kg/m²) (see #1 on the reference list). The BMI also serves as an indicator of the nutritional status of children and adolescents, allowing the identification of undernutrition or nutrition deficiencies, which are associated with increased health risks.

Taking into account the intensive physical training demands of the students as well as the goal of normal physical development, the following rules are established for minimum weight standards at the Ballet Academy:

- Children and adolescents applying for admission to the Ballet Academy must not fall below the minimum BMI to qualify,
- After enrollment, students must not fall below the minimum BMI to continue participating in the regular training program,
- The Health Team calculates the BMI of students at least once per semester,
- If a student falls below the minimum BMI, or if a student loses more than 10% of body weight within three months, the Health Team will develop a treatment plan to restore appropriate weight.
- Faculty members are responsible for proactively discussing concerns regarding the students' body weight with the Health Team,
- Students and/or their parents/guardians are encouraged to consult the Health Team regarding weight and health-related issues.

Physical Well-being

Bachelor students undergo a dance medical examination and nutritional screening in the first semester to assess and ensure their physical well-being. The results are treated confidentially (members of the Health Team are bound by the Ballet Academy's Medical Confidentiality Agreement). Following the examinations, individual dance-specific goals and nutrition plans are developed with the students. The Health Team offers individual counseling to students on various dance-specific topics, e.g., counseling for musculoskeletal issues, injury management, and instruction on building and balancing forms of exercise (Pilates, Progressing Ballet Technique (PBT), yoga, strength/endurance training).

Psychological Well-being

Available services aim to reduce barriers for students seeking support, alleviate psychological stress, teach healthy coping mechanisms, and increase awareness of mental health among the students and faculty:

- The relevant member of the Health Team regularly assesses the mental well-being of students (e.g., through individual consultations) to identify mental stressors early. The results are treated confidentially (the Health Team is bound by the confidentiality clause stipulated in the Medical Confidentiality Agreement),
- Students seeking help can receive individual dance psychological counseling,
- If mental stressors or psychological disorders exceed the scope of dance psychological counseling, students are referred to cooperating treatment facilities to receive timely treatment,
- During acute treatment of students, the teaching staff will adapt the lesson plans individually,
- Long-term plans include the integration of psychology into the Bachelor program curriculum (e.g., learning helpful coping strategies, promoting health literacy, sports psychology, etc.).

Health Promotion

Since the physical and mental health of the students at the Ballet Academy is of paramount importance, the curriculum includes the following components:

The following courses are firmly anchored in the curriculum of the Bachelor program (Module: Body Work I-III, *https://hmtm.de/wp-content/uploads/Studium/Studienplaene/Tanz_SP_BA_ab_WiSe-23-24.pdf*)

- Dance Medicine (learning anatomical structures, identifying physical strengths and weaknesses, the impact of dance training on the body, etc.) 1st to 4th semester, 1.5 contact hours / 1 ECTS credit point per semester and
- Nutrition Education (principles of healthy nutrition and performance enhancement, developing a positive body image, etc.) 1st to 6th semester, 1 contact hour / 1 ECTS credit point per semester.

Regular workshops for students on various health-related topics can also be offered to students:

- Cooking classes, good nutrition and healthy eating behaviors, regeneration strategies, and dance psychological workshops

Individual consultations are also available to students:

- Individual support and development of personalized nutrition plans (one counseling session per semester is mandatory for bachelor students),
- Conversations providing psychological support and screening appointments to assess mental well-being.

If necessary, other experts from the healthcare system are involved, such as nutritionists, physicians, orthopedists, physiotherapists, and psychologists.

The following regulation must be adhered to during the daily training program:

To support students during their intensive training, the Ballet Academy ensures that sufficient breaks for drinking and eating are scheduled in the timetable. It is the responsibility of the teaching staff to ensure regular breaks. For this purpose, a lounge with facilities for preparing and storing food is available.

Health Team involvement and collaboration with the teaching staff

The Health Team maintains close communication with the teaching staff. Information on healthy nutrition, physical and mental stressors of students, and possible prevention and action strategies (within their teaching responsibilities) are provided to teaching staff during regularly-scheduled workshops. The Health Team is available to all faculty members for health-related questions.

Confidentiality

The Ballet Academy respects the privacy of its students. The exact regulations are stipulated in the Medical Confidentiality Agreement, which is signed by the students or parents/guardians at the beginning of the semester. The Health Team is bound by confidentiality (exception: the Health Team members are obligated to break confidentiality if there are signs of acute danger to oneself and/or others). For quality assurance, some mental health data are anonymized and discussed with supervisors (e.g., licensed psychologists and psychotherapists) who are also bound by confidentiality. Members of the Health Team will discuss issues with external healthcare providers only after obtaining the student's explicit written consent and a corresponding waiver of confidentiality. All data and content of consultations are treated as particularly sensitive according to existing data protection regulations. Discourse within the Health Team is also subject to the regulations of the Medical Confidentiality Agreement. Teaching staff are not informed when students are advised by the Health Team on health matters unless it is necessary to adjust training loads or clarify stress situations. In these cases, explicit written consent from the student to discuss health issues is required. If it is deemed necessary to provide additional care for students under 14 years of age, the Health Team will inform parents/guardians and will be available for consultations. The teaching staff should discuss concerns regarding the health or weight of students exclusively with the Health Team of the Ballet Academy. Direct contact with students regarding health matters is solely the responsibility of the Health Team.

Quality Management

The Ballet Academy Management, all faculty and staff, and the Health Team are committed to implementing this policy jointly and evaluating it regularly to ensure an optimal environment for promoting student health. Measures for quality assurance include:

- Providing the Health Policy Statement to students and their parents or guardians at registration,
- Publication of the Health Policy Statement on the website of the Ballet Academy, University of Music and Theater Munich,
- Regularly surveys of students, faculty, staff, and families for continuous improvement of the Health Policy,
- Regular review and development of the Health Policy.

Appendix

Framework and Scientific Background on Dance-Specific Health Issues

Students at the Ballet Academy are trained to be performing artists. For their professional success, they must meet certain anatomical and aesthetic requirements. As a result, this group is exposed to particular stresses and risks.

Students must possess an exceptional degree of flexibility to meet the demands of classical dance. The form and technique of classical dance rely on the external rotation of the hip joints and adhere to classical proportions with a short torso and long extremities. The forced external rotation of the hip joints often leads to overuse injuries of the hips, knees, ankles, and lumbar spine (2). Contemporary dance offers more freedom and reduces anatomical stress.

In terms of aerobic fitness, dancers frequently perform worse compared to other athletes. However, good strength and endurance fitness can enhance dancers' resilience and reduce their susceptibility to injury (3).

Especially in aesthetic sports, higher prevalence of mental health disorders is observed compared to the general population (4). The increased vulnerability of athletes is attributed, among other factors, to stressors such as high intrinsic performance demands, physical injury risk, external performance pressure, low social support, and competitive behavior (5-7). Violence or discrimination through language or non-verbal communication can have an impact on psychological well-being. Language barriers, lack of awareness of physical and mental health, and (self-)stigmatization contribute to athletes rarely seeking professional help (8, 9). Instead, some individuals tend to cope with their stresses on their own by engaging in long-term health-damaging strategies (e.g., substance abuse or binge eating) (9).

The widespread pursuit of extreme thinness can lead dancers to follow very restrictive eating habits that do not allow for balanced and adequate energy and micronutrient intake. Young female dancers consume only 70% of the recommended energy intake and have below-average body weight and fat mass (10, 11). Adolescent dancers require adequate energy and nutrient intake not only for optimal performance but also for normal physical development. Female ballet dancers are known to have eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia three times more frequently than their peers (4, 12). Conscious restrictive eating habits also occur frequently. Disordered eating behaviors are attributed to lack of knowledge about nutrition as well as deficits in emotional regulation, imitation of unhealthy behaviors by other dancers, and unqualified advice from various sources.

With suboptimal nutrition and neglected recovery, the high training demands can lead to chronic energy deficiency, which can have short- and long-term negative effects on the physical and mental health of students. Metabolism and skeletal muscles can be impaired, leading to increased risk of injury, physical and mental exhaustion syndrome, sleep disorders, mood instability, loss of libido, menstrual disorders, infertility, low bone mineral density, hair loss, and dry skin (13, 14).

Unfavorable behaviors cause significant distress which can impair performance. Measures for timely detection of psychological stress, suboptimal nutrition, and disordered eating are therefore as important as professional support for such disorders.

[Minimum standards for weight development \(Body Mass Index\)](#)

BMI percentiles are good indicators for assessing healthy weight development in young people. A BMI value below the 3rd percentile is defined as severely underweight and is associated with increased health risks.

Table 1 shows the BMI minimum values for boys and girls aged 8 to >18 years. Students must not fall below the specified BMI minimum values to participate in the regular training program.

Table 1 BMI minimum values for boys and girls aged 8 to >18 years (1)

| Age | <i>Girls-minimum BMI</i> | <i>Boys-minimum BMI</i> |
|------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | 3rd Percentile | 3rd Percentile |
| 8.0 | 13.36 | 13.57 |
| 8.5 | 13.42 | 13.66 |
| 9.0 | 13.50 | 13.77 |
| 9.5 | 13.59 | 13.90 |
| 10.0 | 13.72 | 14.04 |
| 10.5 | 13.87 | 14.20 |
| 11.0 | 14.06 | 14.36 |
| 11.5 | 14.30 | 14.52 |
| 12.0 | 14.59 | 14.70 |
| 12.5 | 14.91 | 14.89 |
| 13.0 | 15.25 | 15.11 |
| 13.5 | 15.60 | 15.34 |
| 14.0 | 15.95 | 15.59 |
| 14.5 | 16.29 | 15.86 |
| 15.0 | 16.60 | 16.14 |
| 15.5 | 16.90 | 16.43 |
| 16.0 | 17.16 | 16.72 |
| 16.5 | 17.38 | 17.01 |
| 17.0 | 17.58 | 17.30 |
| 17.5 | 17.76 | 17.59 |
| 18.0 | 17.93 | 17.87 |
| >18 | 18.00 | 18.00 |

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