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# Studio's Out for Summer

WHAT TO DO DURING THE OFF-SEASON. By Sara Jarrett

**T**empting as it is to veg out beside the pool all summer, you're better off keeping your body active and toned while you're on vacation. This doesn't mean you should dance all summer long—in fact, it's vital that you take a chunk of time away from the studio! If you're burnt out from the school year, you may even need several weeks. But if you do take a month off, be sure to come back slowly. "It's been researched that for every week a professional athlete takes off, they have to train an additional three weeks to get back to where they were," says Kim Gibilisco, assistant professor of dance and the Pilates program coordinator at Virginia's Shenandoah Conservatory. Use the summer to try new activities, relax and have fun. You'll not only be more likely to avoid major setbacks and injuries in the fall, but you

may also find renewed inspiration along the way. Here are some ideas to get you started:

## GET FIT, CARDIOVASCULARLY

"Summer is a good time to do the kinds of cross-training that you don't normally have time to do," says Donna Krasnow, professor in the Department of Dance at York University in Toronto and the conference director for the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science. "Add an aerobic component to your routine, which could be swimming, biking or taking a 45-minute brisk walk a day. Try the elliptical machine—it's good for a young dancer's body because there's no impact."

A strong cardiovascular system is important, because when your blood is pumping efficiently, you'll have "improved endurance, less fatigue and less perceived exertion," explains Dr. Anthony Luke, co-director of the Healthy Dancer's Clinic at ODC in San Francisco and director of Primary Care Sports Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. "Your breathing and heart rate will also become more proficient, which improves blood flow to your body." This means you'll deliver oxygen more efficiently to your muscles and remove excess waste products, both of which allow you to train harder. Work your cardio system for 30 minutes every three days. (For more on cardio training, see *DS* May/June 2007.)

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### SHAPE UP WITH SOMATICS

Krasnow explains that practices that involve your mind and body—such as yoga, Alexander technique (alexander-technique.com) and C-I Training (“conditioning with imagery,” citraining.com)—do more than just “help maintain muscle tone and keep dance-related muscle patterns firing.” They enhance your creative side. Gibilisco adds, “Somatics helps you focus on how you feel [rather than what you look like].” Heightening your senses will help your dancing become more expressive. Practice one of these techniques twice a week.

### STAY STRONG

Your abdominal, lower back and hip muscles are probably the most crucial areas to keep strong while you’re not dancing. They’re the crux of most complex movement patterns, especially jumps and lifts. “I see a lot of back injuries here,” says Laurie Parlin, a personal trainer, exercise physiologist and Wellness Coordinator at Boston Conservatory. She suggests strengthening your back and core muscles during the summer to avoid getting hurt in the fall. “If the core—the center of our support and power—is weak, it’s likely to cause muscular and postural imbalances that can lead to injuries in the hip, knee, ankle and even neck.” Try lifting weights, doing basic abdominal exercises like crunches or taking Pilates and Gyrotonic classes a few times a week.

### LEARN TO SURF

Having an interest outside of dance can be a great inspiration for your creativity, and it’s a bonus if this interest also keeps you physically fit. Surfing is an ideal sport for dancers during the off-season, because you already “have core strength, balance and flexibility,” says Lora Anderson, a professional dancer based in L.A. and co-owner of Pilatesstudiocity.com. “I’ve gotten in better shape from surfing. Just the paddling alone will get you so strong and ready to take on anything.” If you live inland, you could try other full-body sports like ultimate Frisbee, volleyball or tennis.

### TREAT INJURIES

Focus on healing your body. “Get physical therapy for injuries that you didn’t get proper treatment for during the year,” advises Parlin. “If you know that your ankles are weak, do ankle-strengthening exercises.” Build a routine that can be done in your living room using an exercise band and stability ball.

### INVESTIGATE THERAPEUTIC OPTIONS

Some dancers prepare for performances by seeing massage therapists, acupuncturists and chiropractors, while others can’t perform for days after such appointments. Figure out what works best for you by experimenting during the off-season. “Many therapists specialize in

working on performing artists, so do your research,” Parlin says.

### ATTEND A DANCE FESTIVAL

If you absolutely can’t stay away from the studio for a few weeks, consider a short festival or workshop. This is a great way to stay in shape while getting exposed to new genres of dance and making contacts across the world. “Look for a festival that has a good cross section of teachers in all sorts of genres, as well as Pilates and yoga,” says Gibilisco.



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“Choose one that has an improvisation component and a composition component, and where you can see a lot of dance.” And remember, if you do attend a festival, you should still take a few weeks to recuperate before starting back at your studio.

You don’t need to be ready to perform at your absolute best when the school year starts, but if you can keep your muscles strong while playing in the sun and enjoying your summer vacation, you’ll be one step ahead of the game when you return to classes in the fall. 