

## **Dance, Fitness, Nutrition – My Journey So Far**

**By Sophie Moores**

From a very young age I have been engaged with dancing, sport and physical activity. I began dancing at the age of four, taking Ballroom and Latin American classes and my love for dance and physical activity has grown ever since. I participated in several dance classes each week which varied in styles, alongside other sports such as swimming and gymnastics. All of this physical activity was around my time spent at primary school; early mornings, after school or weekends and in retrospect I am extremely grateful for my parents allowing me to take part in all of this extra-curriculum activity. This is what has founded my passion for physical movement as an entity.

Even through my early years of dance I was informed about, and of how to look after my body in terms of stretching, resting and injury management. I attended a local dance school which I absolutely loved and I feel my Ballet training in particular really informed me about my body physically whilst growing up: posture, alignment, functionality and shape. I was lucky enough to have excellent training, which not only included replication of movement but moreover, included informative lessons about the human body itself and its anatomy. This fascination and interest has resonated with me ever since. During my final years at high school I knew I wanted to take my dance training further into a career, consequently I successfully auditioned for several pre-vocational dance training schemes. One in particular; The Lowry Centre for Advanced Training in Dance (CAT Scheme) which is a tremendous programme that supports aspiring dancers with the transition between high school and professional training – a programme I would highly recommend to anyone and an institution I now work for. This is where I was first given direct guidance regarding nutrition and ongoing information regarding the human body and its anatomy. I have been brought up in a household where we maintain a very healthy balanced diet and this is where I took on my nutritional knowledge and began to make my own personal choices with food. I began to cook and prepare my own meals to take on-the-go during my very busy schedule of extremely long days involving school and dance. I became aware of how to fuel my body correctly for all of the training I was participating in during the week, and additionally, how important my rest time was to recharge. My body required a well-balanced diet to keep my energy levels up, moreover to prevent the risk of injury, which I could not afford whilst I was preparing for important auditions and shows. I learnt the importance of carbohydrates

as fuel although, being a young girl and being conscious of the vague, un-informed myth that 'carbs make you fat', I was still reluctant to consume them. Reflecting back now, this was an absolutely ridiculous thought of mine as I was participating in so much exercise and intense training, therefore burning so much energy that I should not have even be considering that thought!

As I progressed through my teenage years, I became more conscious of the physical appearance of my body. Being a dancer in the dance industry, I personally am extremely critical of myself and I am always striving for more, pushing myself harder. Through my high school years, and into professional training, I found myself comparing myself to others in terms of physical appearance and dance technique and ability. This is something that has come and gone throughout my dance training and a habit I have dulled down and managed through the years.

I moved to London to pursue my professional dance training at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance at the age of eighteen. This transition of moving away from home whilst beginning daily dance training I struggled with at first. On-top of this, I joined a local gym for the first time, which is where my passion for fitness first commenced. I struggled at first, with the difference between my work in the gym supporting my dance training, rather than my

work in the gym overtaking my dance training. At first, I was so keen to 'tone up' and 'see results' (which looking back now, I definitely did not need to worry about) that I would sometimes put so much effort in at the gym, before or in between my dance classes, that I would consequently be physically tired and not mentally focused during my dance classes. I have always had the mentality of sometimes pushing myself too hard and this was a vital moment where I soon learnt, moving into my second year of training, that one definitely affected the other. My work at the gym needed to support my dance training rather than 'improve' my physical body shape. The two types of training needed to compliment each other in order to progress.



I loved attending the gym and learning new ways to train my body. I self-taught myself from influencer's videos on social media and Youtube and was inspired by these individuals tremendously. I was daunted by the weights at first, as most people are, but I soon learnt to love them and that strength training was what would compliment my dance training. I also found it a great sociable experience; attending with friends and training together- it was an escape from dance and something new for us to explore.



Transitioning into my second and third year really tested me physically as well as mentally; my timetable got much fuller with show preparation and several dance projects. I learnt to focus on my dance training and take a little step away from the gym when necessary and the balance between the two improved. Through my nutritional guidance, as well as my prior knowledge, I prepared my meals well and fuelled my body effectively. Meal preparation was extremely important for me. I prepared my lunch the evening before and at weekends, I cooked nutritious meals for my dinners in the week. This was extremely efficient and saved time when I got home late after a full day of dancing. I would recommend this to anyone who has a busy work schedule as it keeps you on track with eating healthy, saves you spending excess money, and prevents you from having to cook a whole meal when you get home and when you are tired. During my third year, everything finally fell into place- my work as a dance artist was progressing and I achieved great marks in my final Independent Project, I was becoming well informed, progressing and enjoying my time in the gym and I was listening to my body.

On completing my training in London, I successfully auditioned for a dance company called JV2 (Jasmin Vardimon Company) in Kent. JV2 was a whole new level of dance training; it was rigorous, demanding and tough, and I learnt so much more about my body whilst I was on this course. We had Pilates class every morning which supported our dance training in the day. This improved my core strength and stability, balance and full body connectivity immensely. Although the Pilates was low impact training before our dancing, it was extremely intense as it worked on strength and endurance of the body and I felt so much stronger in such a short amount of time. Our days at JV2

were long days full of physical movement. Jasmin's style of dance is powerful and extreme but also delicate and detailed and she encourages female empowerment which I very much connected with. It was safe to say; despite the knee pads, tape and trainers, my body was well and truly battered with bruises, blood and pain. This new way of dance training tested my physical and mental ability which felt amazing as I was being pushed to new limits; it was a rollercoaster of a journey. My body adapted well but there were times where I struggled mentally, moreover physically; I learnt to push through and carry on and take care of my body. My diet had to support my training and rest was vital. Admittedly, I still suffered at times, with comparing myself to others and I think that will always come and go with the industry I have been in my whole life.

Completing JV2 and returning home was another transition I struggled with. I had gone from full days of training to nothing filling my days in such a short space of time. I definitely needed this rest but after a while I began to think, what's next? Being a freelance dance artist is extremely unpredictable. I have dance contracts of different lengths and I do not have set working hours with a salary. This is something I have had to learn to adapt to. I now work self-employed as well as employed and whilst in lockdown during Covid-19, I pursued my passion for fitness. Prior to lockdown I was attending my local gym and working out around five times a week, attending dance classes where I could, and maintaining a healthy balanced diet. I am conscious of my portion sizes and focus on balanced, nutritious meals due to training no where near as much as I was.



My journey through dance, fitness and nutrition as a whole has led me to where I am now. It has been a great journey of self-discovery and a pathway which has kept me focused, determined and aspirational. All of my extensive experience and knowledge I would like to use to educate, motivate and encourage others towards a healthy and happy lifestyle. I am always learning more about my body everyday and developing my skills- finding new ways to train, eat and live which makes fitness and the human body so exciting and fascinating.