



Competitions are BACK... *BUT are you Feis Fit?*

Are You Feis Fit's Jeanne Weller is a fitness expert. With so many dancers just coming back from months of lockdown, Jeanne believes **STAMINA** is something every dancer should focus on right now!

A lot of you are just getting back into the studio now, and I have noticed a theme of messages in my inbox on Instagram, asking about improving stamina. So, here's what I want to do. **I'm going to go into a little bit about the science behind stamina training.** My goal here is for you guys to have a basic understanding of stamina training so you can make sure you are practising and training smarter, rather than harder. I will also **lay out some of the dos and don'ts of stamina training.**

Let's start with the science because it is important! For us to move our bodies, our muscles need to contract. In order to contract, they need a special energy-carrying molecule called ATP. That's where our three different energy systems come in. These energy systems all work together to use and create more ATP but depending how long and how intense an activity is, one energy system will be doing a larger percentage of the work.

The three energy systems have fancy-pants names describing how they create more ATP (aka energy) for the body...

THE FIRST ENERGY SYSTEM: THE ATP-PCR SYSTEM

This energy system is straightforward. It is anaerobic (meaning you don't need oxygen for it) and it provides **a lot** of energy quickly, but only for a very short period of time. I like to think of this as the burst of energy you have in the right foot of your lead around, where you are flying and full of power. That is the ATP-PCR System.

THE SECOND ENERGY SYSTEM: THE GLYCOLYTIC SYSTEM (AKA THE

Photo credit: Mykola Lukash at Dreamstime.com



Photo credit: Handmademedia at Dreamstime.com

LACTIC ACID SYSTEM

Around the 10–20 second mark of intense exercise the body is like “alright, we're out of the readily available ATP, what else have we got?”

This is when the second energy system, the Lactic Acid System kicks in more. This energy system produces medium amounts of power for medium amounts of time. Think 20 seconds to two minutes. This is the **MAIN ENERGY SYSTEM WE USE WHEN DANCING.**

For anyone reading that is thinking, ‘I don't care about all this mumbo jumbo, just tell me how to stop dying in the third step of my treble jig,’ **this IS something you need to know.** In fact, if you want to be able to dance flat out for two minutes, you need to train your body to utilise this second energy system more efficiently. You can't train stamina by only going for long leisurely bike rides or nice long runs, you need to train by doing short, intense, 20-second bursts for two minutes.

But don't stop reading quite yet, because there is twist. If the third energy system is trained well, it will actually help the second energy system be even more efficient.

THE THIRD ENERGY SYSTEM: THE OXIDATIVE AEROBIC SYSTEM

Fancy phrase, but don't freak out, I'm going to break it down right here. The Oxidative Aerobic System needs oxygen (hence the name) and is used the most in moderate low-intensity, longer-duration work. Think of that nice long jog or bike ride. If this energy system is better trained (or we have a better base fitness level) it will help us be able to use our second energy system more efficiently.

The takeaway from all of this is that a

stronger foundation equals a more efficient system. Keep this concept of energy system training in mind as we go through these four tips to improve your stamina for dancing...

TIP ONE: Build a solid base. If you want stamina that is strong for dancing, you need to build a solid base. This base is preparing our body in a couple of ways. First, we are improving our base level of fitness because if our base level is higher, our second energy system, our Lactic Acid System (AKA the

“Stamina-wise there is nothing that is quite as challenging as a hard shoe dance all the way through.”

primary energy system we use when we dance), will be able to work more efficiently. Our body is fitter, so we are able to recover faster.

One mistake often made is trying to do everything and as much as possible all at the same time. A lot of injuries (not all) but A LOT of injuries tend to happen when dancers take on a high level of physical activity in a very short period of time. For example,

dancers have summer break during August then go back to class after break and go right into five intense practices a week. Or dancers start a new training programme that includes tons of high-impact work right away.

The human body can do anything, but it needs time to adapt.

For example, a few years ago I ran a marathon. I didn't go out and run 26 miles the first week. If I did, I'd end up injured. Instead I started with running 5 miles and strength training three days a week, then 7, then 9, then 11...etc, etc, etc, and worked my way UP to 26. Each week my muscles and joints got stronger as I progressively overloaded them. **Key word: progressively.**

If you want to reduce your chances of injury, a solid strength, stamina and flexibility foundation needs to be laid before you start doing a 'bazillion' jump lunges, box jumps, or other high-impact movements.

There is no one perfect magic way to build base stamina, and if someone told you they have the one magic formula, that is a marketing tactic. In fact, there are multiple ways to improve base stamina. One way I find works great for dancers is the walk, jog, run drill. That's where you walk for a period of time, jog for a period of time, then run for a period of time for a certain number of minutes. Every couple of weeks you will add →



on time.

If you want my detailed plan on how to progressively build up these time intervals, come jump in the Inner Circle because you'll get the full base stamina training plan. I'll put the link to join at the end of this article if you want to check it out.



Photo credit: Marek Uliasz at Dreamstime.com

TIP TWO: After you've done base stamina for 4–6 weeks, it's time to start working on building the efficiency of your lactic acid system. All that means is training in that second energy system that lasts 20 seconds for two minutes. This is where you will go all out for 20s for two minutes, recover, and then do it again. And again. And again. And again. You may have heard of this referred to as HIIT or high-intensity interval training.

Just like with base stamina, you want to be progressive with this. Do not do 15 hill repeats during your first session. Start with 3–5, then build up by adding a couple more each week. It's way better to start small and progressively improve each week.

Also keep in mind how many conditioning sessions you are doing each week. More does not equal better here. Two or three high-quality sessions is all you need each week because your body needs time to recover, and you are also dancing on top of those sessions, which is a lot of impact on your body.



Photo credit: Bogdhan Hoda at Dreamstime.com

TIP THREE: Do your dances at least twice all the way through in every practice session.

Stamina-wise there is nothing that is quite as challenging as a hard shoe dance all the way through. If you want to get better at something you need to do it more. This is an area we tend to way overcomplicate.

A very obvious, yet easily unglamorous, truth is that if you want to get better at treble jig or hornpipe, or your set all the way through, you have to do it all the way through, more. There is no way around it. It can't get easier until you do it more. Try to do every dance at least twice all the way through in every practice.

TIP FOUR: Use positive self-talk.... If you are in the second step of hornpipe and feel tired, it is easy to just say to yourself "take it easy". A large part of stamina training is self-talk. Just like you teach your body to move in dancing, you must teach your mind how to think. If you tell yourself that *you can't do it*, that *you are too tired*, so *you should take it easy for a bit*, you are training your mind to repeatedly have those thoughts. Our thoughts create our actions. Imagine your dance teacher saying, "*You can do this!! You*

got it! Keep pushing!!!"

If you tell yourself "I've got this, I can do this," then you are training your mind to think that way and thus, dance that way.

One useful strategy with self-talk can be coming up with a mantra. A mantra is a word that can aid in concentration. It is often used in meditation and yoga but can be used in other times where concentration is needed as well. For example, a mantra you can use during stamina work is, *I can do this*, or *just keep pushing*. Repeat that over and over again to remind yourself to keep pushing through instead of falling back into old patterns of thinking.

Those are my four tips – for a quick recap all you need to do is: build a solid base, then add in more high-intensity training, practise your dances all the way through, and use positive self-talk! This is a winning formula for improving your stamina!

If you want more Irish dance strength and conditioning tips, make sure to follow me @areyoufeisfit on Instagram and if you are ready to go all-in with achieving unstoppable stamina, head to www.ireyoufeisfit.com to learn more about Feis Fit's Inner Circle! 

