

INFORMATION ON SHOES FOR DANCING SALSA

The following are brief guidelines on a very complex subject, where specialists may differ in their approach. This is one viewpoint only.

Good quality, well-fitting dance shoes that feel good on your foot, are well worth it if you are going to dance regularly.

Not only will they stop your feet aching after a hard night's dancing – they will also stop problems developing in your feet, ankles and other joints - especially ankles, knees, hips and lower backs (but almost any joint could suffer as a result).

If you already have problems, then your shoes are crucial to stop any exacerbation. Please feel free to discuss any problems with us, but as we are not medically trained we suggest you speak to your doctor or physiotherapist etc regarding footwear.

As you get older, wearing good footwear also becomes even more important.

Consider buying several pairs of shoes with varying heights, support, flexibility and slipperiness so you can vary your shoes depending on the type of dancing you will be doing (class, club, party etc), the floor you are dancing on and how your feet feel that day.

Please note that no responsibility can be accepted by Red Hat Salsa for any problems regarding shoes bought through any shoe shop.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING DANCE SHOES

GENERAL TIPS

Don't necessarily go by the recommendations made by sales assistants in the dance shoe shops. Some of them know a lot - but many don't know much about what shoes are good for the feet - they focus more on what looks good. Also, they often know more about ballet and other forms of dance than Salsa.

Beware - many of the so-called dance shoes aren't actually much good for your feet (or are positively bad!) - they just look good when dancing!

The better ones are usually called 'practise' shoes, have more cushioning and may be lace-up.

You need to make sure that you have a shoe that fits well, has good cushioning (for the whole of the foot), supports your foot well and feels comfortable.

Dance shoe shops generally sell a shoe called a 'Character' shoe – so called as it was used by actors when getting into 'character'. The character shoes come in canvas (cheaper) or the better leather version. The leather shoes are called 'Showgirl Character' shoes.

These are a plain black leather shoe with a strap across the top (or a T-bar strap) with a buckle, suede soles and a Cuban heel - less than 2 inches high.

You can also get them with a higher heel, though I do not recommend this.

1) SOLES

A smooth sole makes all the difference – you will be amazed at how much easier it is to spin with a leather or suede sole.

Wear them only on the dance floor - change shoes when you arrive and leave or you ruin the sole.

You must also ensure that you wear shoes that are appropriate for the floor you are dancing on, your level of competence etc.

Beware of shoes with deep grooves (grip) on the soles (eg trainers) – these stick on turning and can cause injury as the foot sticks to the floor and the body and leg turn but the foot stays where it is causing foot, ankle and knee strain.

1.1) Leather soles

Smooth leather soles can be VERY slippery, and unless you are a highly competent dancer, wanting to spin very quickly, this can be dangerous as you risk falling – especially on a fast floor.

To get over this problem, some leather soles are scored. However, make sure that this does not wear off if you wear the shoes a lot.

1.2) Suede soles

These are generally very good to spin in, but suede soles need to be cared for.

They gradually pick up the dust etc on the floor and become slippery – this is easily resolved by brushing with a suede brush for SOLES. Please note that a general suede brush is designed for the tops of shoes and will not work effectively on soles.

Penny of Arabesque sells brushes for soles at £3.99. It is a hooked brush and really works! If suede soles get wet they will also get too slippery, allow them to dry out then brush.

Penny also stocks proper suede soles which can be fixed to the bottom of trainers and other shoes to make them easier to spin in. They are called 'Non-skid' because they are intended to allow you to spin, but not to slip unintentionally.

1.3) Trainers

Normal trainers provide excellent cushioning but far too much grip so they should NOT be worn when dancing Salsa, especially if you are spinning at all.

The grip can cause injury on turning, as the foot sticks to the floor and the body and leg turn but the foot stays where it is causing foot, ankle and knee strain.

1.4) Dance sneakers

Some dance sneakers come with a smooth pu (type of man-made sole) bottom which is far better to turn on than a normal trainer.

Some dance sneakers come with a turning circle. We do NOT recommend these for salsa as they are designed for professional dancers and to turn effectively you have to 'releve' (ie rise up) and have your weight exactly on the turning circle, we don't generally do this dancing Salsa, so the turning circle is ineffective for us.

2) CUSHIONING

It is very important to have cushioning (preferably over the entire foot) to help absorb the shock to protect your foot and the rest of your body from the constant pounding – many dance shoes, however, have no cushioning – or very little.

So, one option is to go for the dance shoes with more cushioning.

One dance shoe which does have more cushioning than most is called 'The Flex' and is available from Penny - details at the end of this email.

Another option is to buy a dance shoe called a 'Practise' shoe, which often has more cushioning.

2.1) INSOLES

However, the 'Practise' shoes don't look so good (low heel and lace up), so if you are not happy with the look of them, another option is to buy your own good quality full length insole eg a gel insole such as 'Sorbothane' and use that in any shoe to give it more cushioning.

Buy the insoles BEFORE going to try on the shoe and take them with you. Then you can try the shoes on with the insoles in them, so you can get the correct size. It is important that they fit well and you MAY possibly need to buy a larger size than usual to accommodate the insole. Your toes should not feel squashed in the shoes.

However, the shoes should not be too large or they will rub (possibly causing blisters) and will not support your foot well enough (see also the section on 'Support').

3) HEEL HEIGHT

A slight heel is recommended as this alters your weight placement, making it easier to move and therefore to dance in time to the music.

In normal stance most of the weight is on the heel. When dancing Salsa, although we will be moving the weight around the foot, we need to come back to a position where more weight is on the ball of the foot, rather than the heel, to allow us to move around quickly and easily.

If your weight is 'back' on your heel (normal stance) you have to shift your weight forward before you can move, this takes a fraction of a second but is one of the main causes for people being slightly behind the beat.

One way of changing your weight through your feet is to alter your posture. However, a slight heel will help you to do this without you even realizing it.

Heel height of 1 inch, 1.5 or 2 inches is ideal. This alters your weight placement but still keeps your weight on the entire foot. Over 2 inches and the centre of balance is shifted too much onto the ball of the foot. This higher heel height can cause pain in the balls of the foot and possibly bunions! If you find the balls of your feet ache when you dance check your heel height as this could be the reason!

Much over 2 inches is VERY bad for your posture, back, knees etc, and affects how you move and hold yourself profoundly, making dancing much harder.

Many people prefer to dance on an almost flat foot, jazz shoes and dance sneakers all have a quarter inch heel although they look flat. Although used widely, this is not ideal if you are dancing a lot.

4) HEEL WIDTH

A narrow heel should be avoided - definitely don't wear kitten or stiletto type heels - as all your body weight is concentrated into a very small area, so you can hurt someone badly if you tread on their toe, or scrape their ankle as you step back (something which is bound to happen at some point when dancing!)

They are also very hard to dance in - and can damage dance floors, especially if they are metal-tipped.

A wide heel is MUCH easier to dance in, as it is easier to balance. Cuban heels are good from this point of view.

5) SUPPORT: Rigidity vs flexibility

The feet should be well supported by a dance shoe.

However, there is a trade-off between support vs flexibility ie the more rigid a shoes is the more support, but the less flexibility you get.

Some shoes hold the foot firmly in place allowing little movement, others allow the foot to move through its normal range of movement. Try different styles and find what you are comfortable wearing.

The more rigid the material the shoe is made of, the more support it will give you. So leather is much better than eg canvas shoes. The more flexible the material a shoe is made of, the less support it will give.

So a balance has to be struck between flexibility and support. For Salsa, less flexibility is required than for many other dancers eg ballet, street dance, but it is important that the shoe feels comfortable to you, and not too rigid when dancing.

Good fit and hold your foot

To give your foot good support, the shoe also needs to fit well, especially around your heel. If it is loose fitting your heel is not held in place (so sling-backs are not good as a closed heel is better).

A lace up shoe is best as it fits well and supports the foot. If you don't want this, then the next best thing is a shoe with a buckle (or some other way of adjusting the fit eg velcro) across the top – rather than eg a slip on shoe.

An ankle boot gives the best support, as you get very good support for your foot and ankle, and the lace system gives a good fit. However, some people will find this too restrictive when dancing. Take notice of how the shoes feel to you when standing, dancing etc.

6) ARCH SUPPORT/SPLIT-SOLED TRAINERS

Some dance shoes have metal arch support, which is great, especially if you have dropped arches.

The split soled trainers are BAD for your feet as they give NO arch support, which you need.

In addition and you don't really need the split sole for Salsa dancing that much flexibility in the foot is not required for Salsa.

These are NOT made for Salsa dancing - whatever they may tell you in the shoe shop!

7) COST – Cheaper Option

Leather shoes will cost £60-£70ish

Man-made shoes £35 upwards

A cheaper option are the black canvas 'Character' shoes with suede soles and a (rather too) low heel.

These are not ideal as the canvas doesn't support your foot well, but at about £20 they are a cheap option – or something to tide you over until you can buy something else and they do have a suede sole.

However, as they sell them mainly for girls doing ballet, they sometimes have a pink elastic strap across the top! Don't worry - you can colour them black with a felt tip pen.

Penny also stocks proper suede soles which can be fixed to the bottom of trainers and other shoes to make them easier to spin in. Thus saving the cost of buying new shoes. They are called 'Non-skid' because they are intended to allow you to spin, but not to slip unintentionally.

8) DANCE SHOES/ORDINARY SHOES

The main differences between dance shoes and ordinary shoes are:

- i) that dance shoes have a more slippery sole
- ii) to give them more flexibility, most dance shoes don't have a metal bar running through them, as do ordinary shoes.
- iii) Dance shoes are generally lighter, and made from more flexible material (soft leather etc) on the uppers and sole, to give some flexibility (which is needed when dancing Salsa) and to prevent the shoe chaffing the foot.
- iv) They have more room for the toes to move and some have more cushioning.

You don't NEED to buy dance shoes, if you can find suitable shoes (or

ankle boots) in an ordinary shoe shop.

However, these days it is very hard to get ordinary shoes which have a slippery sole, as everything is non-slip, so for this reason alone you will probably need to buy dance shoes.

It is also very important to have shoes with cushioning – however, unfortunately, many dance shoes do not have cushioning, or have very little, so ordinary shoes can score well on this count.

9) BUYING SHOES

Dancia International
36-38 Prospect Street
Caversham
Reading
RG4 8JL
Tel: 0118 947 8123

Fame (a bigger one)
9 Denmark St.
Wokingham
RG40 2AY
Tel: 0118 9788657 - closed on Wednesdays

Flash Dance
(They will give you 10% discount if you heard about the shop from Red Hat Salsa.)
133 High St
Egham
TW20 9HL
Tel: 01784 477212

Dancers World
18 London Road
Blackwater
GU17 9AA
Tel: 01276 600935

LONDON

Dancia
(They will give a 10% discount to customers from the Red Hat Salsa School.)
187 Drury Lane
London
WC2B 5QD
Tel: 0207 831 9483
www.dancia.co.uk

Nearest tube - High Holburn (possible also - Aldwych)

From High Holburn:
Come out of the tube and carry straight on past Sainsburys. Dury Lane is the first left after the Post Office. 3-4 mins walk. Their swinging sign says "The Dancers Shop' not 'Dancia'.

The staff at Dancia should know which shoes recommend for Salsa (character shoes - about £38 - they do various makes).

Alternatively, the best shoes for dancing salsa, have been told, are Rhumba shoes made in Spain. There is a shop in London who imports them - let me know if you want details.

I hope this is helpful and that you manage to fit something comfortable and good to dance in.

Please do contact me any time if you have any questions.

SHARON