

Warm Up and Cool Downs for Clogging

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Not only is clogging a fun social dance but it is also a low (sometimes high) impact form of exercise and any and all dance classes should be treated as such. A proper warm up and cool down should be done for each class. At workshops, it's always so much fun but sometimes we suffer if we don't warm up or cool down properly.

Warmups are important as they can prevent injuries by loosening up joints and muscles and getting synovial fluid moving. It also helps you redirect blood flow from your organs to your muscles. The purpose of a warm up is to raise your body temperature and make your muscles, tendons and ligaments more flexible and receptive to strenuous activity and less likely to tear. It should gradually increase your heart rate, increasing blood circulation and prepare your body for the movements that will be coming in the class. Going from zero to 100, like we sometimes do, decreases your stamina as well, so a gradual warmup will increase your stamina and allow you to dance longer.

Specifically, the muscles that should be warmed up are our leg muscles: hamstrings, quadriceps, calves, adductors, abductors and hip flexors. If you are doing a lot of arm movements in your choreography then you should do a full top to bottom warm up, including neck, shoulders, biceps, triceps, upper back and chest.

Warm up music – For clogging, it should be between 90 -110 beats per minute (bpm) to get started and that depends on the level of class, it could be slightly faster (no more than 120) or slower (down to 70 bpm) depending on the age, ability and level of dancing that is to come. The older or more out of shape the population of a class is, the slower and longer the warm up should be. Using 32 beat straight phrased music is best – hoedown music works quite well and/or straight phrased step aerobics warm up music. These can be purchased online, YES! Music, Muscle Mixes, iTunes are some examples of locations that “fitness” music can be located.

Ideally, a warm up will include movement similar to what is to be done during the class and should include some dynamic stretching (dynamic stretching is using full range of motion that would be included in an upcoming movement, this can be accomplished by doing some steps slower and more controlled and really exaggerate a movement, for example, really lifting the knee in a brush or chug accomplishes dynamic stretching). Anywhere between 5-10 minutes will be enough and it doesn't have to be called a warm up (sometimes I just call it step practice.) Try to avoid using static stretching before beginning any movement as this could lead to injury (specifically muscle tears) and decrease muscle stamina. I.e. Quad and calf stretches should only be done after at least a 5 minute brisk warmup. Imagine trying to stretch a rubber band after it has been in a freezer. Stretching will be discussed more in depth later in this article.

Example: Easy Intermediate levels and above Warmup

Doing 16 – 32 beats per step (sometimes more if they are 8 beat steps and you are switching lead legs)

Basics, Triples, Triple Brushes, Vine Brushes, Slur Vine Brush, Clogover Vines, Clogover Slur Vine, Cowboys (a triple brush and fancy double will switch lead leg in an 8 beat step pattern, just a triple in a 4 beat step pattern), pushoffs, rock forward and back, fancy doubles (3 with a triple will switch lead leg), touches (front, side and toe taps), hillbillies, donkeys, outhouses, strums, cross overs, cross over rockbacks, high horses (3 with a triple and fancy double will switch lead leg), samanthas (3 with a triple and fancy double will switch lead legs)

Basics, triples get the blood moving. Brushes warm up hip flexors, rock steps warm up calf muscles, cowboys introduce forward and back motions, pushoffs introduce left and right movement and warmup abductors and adductors and calves, touches and strums work on balance (core muscles), quads and hamstrings.

For beginners – do steps they know as you are progressing through your beginner program or choose a simple line dance to just get the blood moving. Advanced dancers – same thing as above but increase the intensity by adding harder steps that are included in their routines – flatfooting, bucking, Canadians etc.

Cool Down

Cooling down – the reverse of the warm up. It is very important that after any intense aerobic activity that increases our heart rates to the aerobic fat burning zone (60-80% of max heart rate), to not just stop and just go sit down afterward. Bringing our heart rate down slowly will prevent your blood from pooling in one place such as your legs. Blood pooling can lead to dizziness, nausea and fainting. You'll want to redirect blood flow back to normal otherwise you'll place undue stress on your heart, this is especially important in older populations and those with diabetes and heart issues.

Reviewing some of the steps you taught in class at a slower pace will help with this.

Stretching

In the past, it was recommended that you do static stretches (stretching to the farthest point of range and holding) of muscles before doing any activity. Recent fitness studies indicate that it is important **NOT** to stretch cold muscles. Stretching cold muscles can cause injury such as tears and pulls and static stretching before warming up or doing an activity can actually decrease muscle stamina. Static Stretching should **NOT** be part of a warm up. Static Stretching **AFTER** an activity is important to reduce soreness and increase flexibility.

The best time to stretch is when your muscles are heated from activity. Your muscles will be the most receptive to stretching and have the least chance of injury. For light stretching – hold each pose for 10-20 seconds, for increasing flexibility hold poses for 30 seconds or more.

Starting at the top:

Neck bends left, right, ear to shoulder, bend front – **DO NOT BEND NECK BACK NOR DO CIRCLES**, look left and right
Shoulders forward, back and up, and reverse direction

Upper back and chest

Lower back

Ham strings

Calves

Quads

At the end of the cool down and stretching, heart rate should be back to normal.

RANDOM POINTS

People with longer limbs cannot execute movements as quickly as those with short limbs. Faster music may cause these people to appear clumsy, and not to be able to complete the movements within their range of motion.

Heavier people cannot execute movements as quickly as those at average weight.

Music with a BPM higher than 128 will encourage dancers to compromise form and technique and could potentially be unsafe especially on a slippery floor. It's fun to really get moving with the faster songs but for safety reasons, you might consider keeping the music slower so dancers can maintain control of their movements.