

Alvin Ailey book teaches dancer workouts

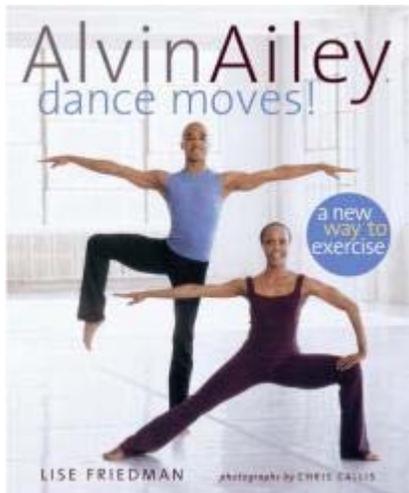
Ballet group tells how to move to get fit, avoid injuries

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The physical demands of performing emotional and theatrical ballet, jazz, modern and other dance genres provide Renee Robinson with quite a good workout. So, before and after her performances, the professional dancer gets in a really good workout.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre 'Alvin Ailey Dance Moves' offers 50 exercise and routines for a dance-based approach to fitness.



"Alvin Ailey Dance Moves" Relax and rejuvenate with deep breathing that relieves tension and helps you recharge.

"I'm a huge advocate of movement," said Robinson, who jumps rope, walks, works out at the gym and performs yoga and other exercises to stay fit and energized. "Dance is a physical movement, but doing other things enhances what I have to do on the floor," she said.

In her 27th season with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which performs in Atlanta Thursday through Sunday, Robinson says her muscles are longer now because of the additional strength and conditioning she enjoys. She's also improved her stamina by augmenting her cardio workout with more upper-body movements.

Dancing merges art with athleticism, and the Ailey dancers are known as some of the most athletic, thanks to their varied choreography. The Ailey troupe this year celebrates 50 years of electrifying audiences with their high energy and passion coupled with smooth, controlled and deliberate movements.

"They all have very healthy-looking, well-toned bodies," said Shaw Bronner, director of physical therapy for the Ailey dancers. "You know right away that this is an athlete."

Dancing conditions and tones the body, improves posture and increases strength, and "a strong muscular body is a healthy body when it's flexible and supple," says Robinson, whose exercise techniques, and those of other Ailey dancers, are showcased in "Alvin Ailey Dance Moves." The fitness book draws from the disciplines of the Ailey School to help nondancers feel and look like one with exercises that can be done at home.

To achieve the look of a dancer, start by moving, Robinson recommends. Do whatever you enjoy, such as swimming, jumping rope or throwing the ball in the yard, and do it frequently. Also, practice good form by making sure your technique is correct, and treat yourself to therapeutic massages to relieve stress and prevent injury. "It's a great help ... especially if you're an athlete," she said. The injury rate among dancers is quite high, and their career lifespan low, says Bronner. To prevent muscle strains, let the body do what it wants to do instead of forcing it, she says.

"If you've never danced before, then you have no business trying to do a split," she said.

Robinson, who believes in feeling "zesty, sparkly, awake and energetic" throughout her day, stresses a diet that keeps the body moving inside and out. She eats plenty of leafy green vegetables and whole fruits to keep her digestive system flowing, drinks lots of water and avoids sodas and alcohol.

Still, her diet does not involve complete deprivation, as Robinson treats herself to an occasional burger, fries and potato chips, and will "kill for good macaroni and cheese."

Robinson attributes her nearly three decades of high-level performing to her diet and exercise regimen, and describes herself as "the age that gets it done, the age I love being and still healthy enough to apply it."