

Sickling is a ballet term that is used to describe a dancer's foot that is incorrectly placed or pointed, causing it to look curved inwards.

A sickled foot is somewhat common during training because the amount of flexibility in a person's foot and ankle is generally greater on the inside of the foot. If a dancer thinks of simply "pointing your feet as hard as you possibly can!" the foot almost naturally goes into a sickled position.

When most people hear the word "sickle" they likely think of a useful tool for harvesting grain. When it comes to a dancer's technique, dancers foot has actually similar appearance:



So why is sickling considered a correction if it's more natural?

A dancer who always sickles will likely develop incorrect muscles over time and struggle with weakness in the ankles, which as you can imagine can limit an overall ability to perform more advanced steps.

So What Exactly is Sickling?

Let's take a look at a few pictures and you'll see exactly what "sickling your foot" looks like.



In a sickled foot, the toes are in front of the ankle and heel.

In a correctly pointed foot, the heel and ankle are slightly in front of the toes.

Here, in tendu side, we see a sickled foot on the left and a correctly pointed foot. Notice how the toes are well in front of the line that her calf is making, while the correct picture has them slightly behind the inside of her ankle.



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The heel is dipped under, with the toes in front of the line from the leg and ankle bone in a sickled foot.

The toes are behind the line from the heel, meaning the heel is leading in a correctly pointed foot.

Now, demonstrating tendu to the front, notice how the foot is dipped under with the heel close to the ground, while the correct photo on the right shows once again that the toes are behind the inside of her ankle.



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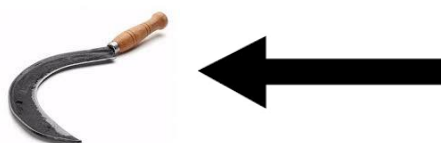
Demonstrating tendu back, a sickled foot will once again have the toes ahead of the line of the heel and ankle.

In a correctly pointed foot to the back, the heel is still forward from the toes.

Finally, in tendu to the back, the sickled foot practically has its toes pointing straight into the floor with the heel sticking up in the back. On the correct picture, the toes are once again behind the line from the inside of the ankle.

Even though you just saw three different positions, try to look at how the shape of the foot actually doesn't change, the only difference is where the leg is.

Properly pointed foot allows the dancer to have more functional technique. Think about



which might be stronger to balance on...

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After years of training correctly, the muscles in your foot will also adapt and become stronger, making many more advanced steps quite a bit easier because you can

transfer your strength from your legs and feet into the floor with more power and stability.

A sickled foot in a pointe shoe has a very high chance of rolling over and causing injury when going up on pointe.

Sickling is sometimes tricky to self-correct, in beginners it most commonly happens because there's already so many things to think about, but always try to remind yourself about the shape of your foot.

Conclusion:

Sickling of the foot is not desirable visually in dance, but it is also a significant risk factor for injury. A sickled foot represents one that has an imbalance in strength, around the “stirrup” muscles. The stirrup muscles are responsible for rolling the foot inward and outward,



but also help hold the ankle in line when in relevé (half toes). When an ankle is weak in these muscles, a dancer is more susceptible to ankle sprains, tendinitis, and impingement syndromes. Weakness in these muscles also makes going up on pointe a significant struggle and can be a factor that holds students back from progressing successfully into pointe shoes.

Check Your Line

You can check for sickling in your foot by drawing an “X” on the front of your ankle and again at the base of your 2nd toe (as pictured), then draw a line to connect the two.



Exercises to fix sickling:

Ball Squeeze Relevé: Standing in parallel, place a small inflated ball between your ankles. Lightly press into the ball with your ankles as you relevé slowly up and down,



watching your feet to maintain a vertical line to the floor. Focus on pushing your weight through the 2nd toe into the floor. Repeat 20 reps, 2-3 sets, daily. It's important to train your muscles in the manner in which you intend to use them. For best results, complete these exercises 5-7x/week and don't forget to stick with it!