

Beyond Flexibility

This document has been created to further explain the symptoms shown on the infographic. These symptoms can happen when a person has more naturally occurring flexibility than usual, which may be due to an inherited form of hypermobility.

Please note, this document is for information only and is not a medical diagnosis.

If you think you might have hypermobility and recognise any of the issues mentioned, we've included links for more support. However, we strongly recommend that you speak to your doctor or physiotherapist for professional advice and a proper diagnosis.



How hypermobility affects joints and movement

Hypermobility is linked to fragile connective tissue. At a very rudimentary level, connective tissue supports the skeleton, protects and cushions organs and joints, attaches muscles to bones (via tendons) and bones to each other (via ligaments), and carries oxygen and nutrients through the blood. When connective tissue is fragile, it can lead to more frequent injuries, bruising, scarring, and more visible stretch marks than normal.

People with a hypermobile body are often called "double-jointed." They may also have unexplained leg pain at night, which could be linked to their body type. In children, this pain is sometimes wrongly dismissed as "growing pains" or even as "attention seeking." But because their connective tissue is very stretchy, their joints lack the support, cushioning, and protection that normal joints have, and this may be the real cause of the pain.

Dancing can be good for you!



When supported by a knowledgeable dance teacher who understands hypermobility and flexibility, dance can help build strength, balance, coordination and body awareness. With the right guidance, it can be a safe, empowering and enjoyable way to move.

Unexplained pain can happen especially after too much exercise, for example on a day when they've had both a PE class or a "daily mile" activity at school in addition to intensive after-school dance training. For this reason, if someone is hypermobile, it is advised that they carefully monitor, how long and how much exercise they get in a single day and across the week's schedule.

Stretchy and fragile connective tissue can also lead to frequent sprains, dislocations, and joint instability. The good news is that regular, carefully controlled exercise can help strengthen the muscles and tendons around the joints. Moreover, hypermobility can also manifest as general muscle weakness, underdeveloped muscle tone and fluid retention in the limbs. If not understood, this can lead to unwarranted body dissatisfaction and disordered eating habits. People with hypermobility also decondition more rapidly than others after a break from class because of a holiday, illness or recovery from injury. This can lead to frustration and demotivation if not understood. For this reason, if someone is hypermobile, it is advised that they carefully monitor their return to activity with professional support.



Quality dance training is good for you!

A knowledgeable dance teacher who understands hypermobility and flexibility can help with a return-to-class schedule that is bespoke for the hypermobile body. Dancing is actually good for people with hypermobility and can be a great source of support.

How hypermobility affects the mind

People with hypermobility tend to suffer from more anxiety and depression than people without hypermobility. One possible explanation for this link is the pain and injuries that are common in hypermobility. Hypermobile bodies tend to be flexible, but less stable, which could lead to feeling less supported physically. This can, in turn, lead to an internal feeling of instability. People with Joint hypermobility also have changed patterns of interoception (feeling the body from within), which makes them able to notice small changes in their body (e.g., awareness of their heart rate, feeling their blood flowing), while their proprioception (feedback from the outside) is reduced in comparison to those without hypermobility. This can make people with hypermobility pay a lot of attention to internal cues, and they may think they are anxious or overwhelmed when an alternative explanation is lacking (e.g. “my heart is racing, but I did not exercise = I am anxious”). Awareness to this phenomenon can help attribute such feelings to the right source.

Dancing can also be good for your mind!



A knowledgeable dance teacher who understands hypermobility can provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment. With the right awareness, dance can be a positive experience for the hypermobile mind, building confidence, self-regulation and a sense of achievement.

More ways that hypermobility affects the mind

People with hypermobility are more likely to suffer from various learning difficulties, including dyslexia, coordination problems, difficulties with orientation in space and with quick changes of directions (also related to the lower accuracy of proprioception/sense of where their body is in space). This could mean they will need more time to learn new things / skills. People with hypermobility are also more likely to be neurodivergent and have either Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Neurodivergence shares other characteristics with hypermobility, such a clumsiness, heightened sensitivity, distractedness, difficulty to regulate emotions and more. A knowledgeable dance teacher can allow the students more time to learn new skills/moves and help by tailoring the learning to each student's specific needs.

Hypermobility is also often connected to fatigue. This is related to poor sleep, and pain, but also seems to be related to common related conditions, such as allergies and inflammations as well as symptoms such as dizziness, excessive sweating and more, which are related to the autonomic nervous system. Brain fog, which is a difficulty to remember things or to think, is also relate to the same accompanying conditions.

More ways that hypermobility affects the mind

People with hypermobility have many different sleeping problems, some of which are related to some extent to pain, other underlying physical conditions and to depression and anxiety. Hypermobile people tend to suffer from lighter sleep, difficulty to fall asleep and many wake ups during the night. Moreover, the quality of the sleep of people with hypermobility tends to be poorer. In practical terms, this may need monitoring and in particular when a dance's schedule is heavier than usual (e.g., preparation for exams, competition or a performance) as fatigue can lead to accidents and injury.



Ways that regulation of the body is connected to hypermobility

Connective tissue helps keep the body working properly by supporting its structure, moving fluids around, and helping cells communicate. It plays a key role in metabolism, immune defence, and how the body senses and responds to physical stress.

When connective tissue is fragile or disordered, these systems may not work as well as they should. This is why people with hypermobility can suffer from dizziness when they change levels quickly when they are dancing or warming up. For example, a commonly repeated warm up move - rolling down from head to toes to loosen and relax the spine, and then back up again, can cause disorientation and dizziness (often describes as seeing stars) which can be off-putting for a young dancer at the beginning of a class.

When the body's regulatory system is affected, a person with hypermobility may also sweat more and suffer from palpitations and last minute 'unexpected' needs to go to the toilet. Research also suggests other symptoms that are associated with hypermobility such as pelvic and gut related issues, for example endometriosis, hernias, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and gluten intolerance (GI).



More ways that regulation of the body is connected to hypermobility

Finally, a combination of altered body awareness such as poor sense of the body in space (proprioception) in addition to a weak musculoskeletal system may account for poor alignment, posture and coordination which can lead to frustrations, clumsiness and dyspraxia.



In dance, having a good range of motion in the joints is important because it helps dancers achieve the right positions, lines and the overall look of the dance style. However, if that range is naturally excessive, as for example with hypermobility, dancers need to spend extra time strengthening their bodies. This helps them control their flexibility and avoid injury. It is also important for hypermobile dancers to be aware that hypermobility can affect their sense of balance, body awareness, and internal body systems. Understanding this can help them maintain both a healthy body and a healthy mind

What to do next?

If you know or think you may be hypermobile, it is worth discussing this with your dance teacher(s) as they will be able to help you develop and maintain a healthy body and mind through your dance and supplementary training.

Some more resources and support you :

What is Hypermobility?

<https://www.hypermobility.org/what-is-hypermobility>

NHS Joint Hypermobility Syndrome

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/joint-hypermobility-syndrome/>

The School Toolkit for hypermobility

<https://theschooltoolkit.org/what-are-jhs-and-eds/>

Leo aged eight talks about hypermobility and school

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxsEUBkN5Ho>

This document was created by researchers and dance teachers, Dr Wendy Timmons and Liron Blajwajs as part of the ESRC IAA Hypermobility Awareness project in partnership with Scottish Ballet and the Dance Research in Scotland network (DaReS), University of Edinburgh. The content is current as of 15th August 2026. For further information contact wendy.timmons@ed.ac.uk



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

SCOTTISH
BALLET