

jazzercise

Perfect Plies

Plies in any form are a tremendous workout for the lower body muscle groups; specifically for the quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteals. The same basic muscles are worked in turnout, no turnout, demi, grand, hip release or torso upright positions. The different styles are useful at different times and have slight variations in techniques.

While lowering into a plie, there is flexion at the hip and flexion at the knee. The gluteals, quadriceps and hamstrings all work eccentrically to control the movement downward.

When lifting out of a plie, there is extension at both the hip and the knee. The gluteals, quadriceps and hamstrings all work concentrically to raise the body upward.

You may want to think of plies as falling into one of two basic categories:

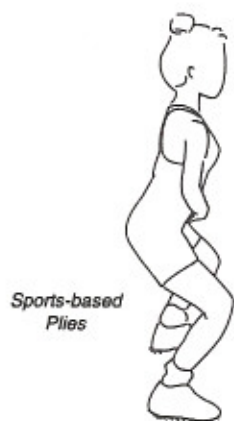


Dance - based plies

Neutral spine with torso upright
Tailbone directly down
Shoulders over hips
Can lift heels into releve

Sports - based plies

Neutral spine
Hips press backward
Body weight slightly toward heels
Chest up



The two categories have two basic differences:

1. Placement of the torso
2. Placement of the weight on the foot

Dance - based plies can be done in a variety of foot positions - demi or grand, turnout, turn-in, or no turnout...but, the torso is almost always upright and in "neutral." When lowering into a plie, think of sending your tailbone directly downward with your shoulders over your hips. Your spine stays in neutral alignment by not allowing additional movements. For example, do not let your pelvis tuck under or release backward. Also, do not let your shoulders round forward. In dance classes, teachers often ask students to think "up" rather than "down" when lowering into plie; in an effort to encourage students to elongate their torsos while bending their legs.

Test your dancer's style of weight distribution by doing a plie, then lifting your heels. The ankle is firm without rolling out. When the foot is flat on the floor, the muscles through the arch of the foot are slightly lifted. Yet, there should be no rolling in or out on the ankles.

Keeping the weight distributed properly on the foot can be a key in maintaining "knees over toes" while in a plie. For example, shifting the weight toward the inside of the foot generally causes the leg to internally rotate, causing the knee to "roll in." Sometimes the hip will follow suit and roll in as well.

Sports-based plies are generally done in second position with no turn out. This plie is usually grand and is trademarked by the hips pressing backward. In a traditional gym setting, it is usually called a squat.

When lowering into this grand plie, your heels stay on the floor. Press your glutes backward as if you are trying to find the seat of a chair. The torso stays completely neutral with the chest up, as the hip angle closes. Think "press the hips back," not "lean the torso forward."

For our purposes, bending the knees 60-75 degrees is adequate. Care needs to be taken that both the knees and the back are in good form. The knees can bend to approximately 80-90 degrees with the thighs parallel to the floor, but this is a rather advanced movement. Less fit students may need to gradually work toward that deep a motion.

Distribution of body weight on the foot can shift slightly toward the heels. Experiment with shifting body weight to different sites on the foot. See how it effects placement of the torso and the heels.

When lifting out of the hip release grand plie, it's sometimes helpful to think of pressing "from the heels."

Master the basics before adding additional movements. This hip release grand plie position can easily accommodate additional resistance. Weights are often held with arms at sides, hands on hips or on shoulders.

Guidelines for demi plies are the same:

- Heels do not come off the floor
- Torso neutral - do not tuck the pelvis under