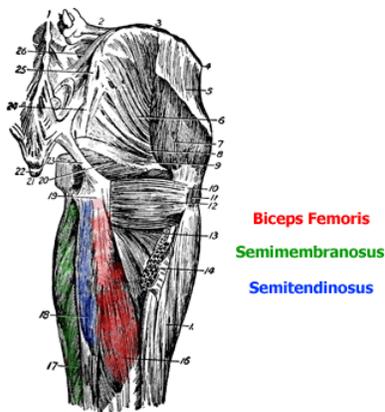


**What does it take to get on pointe?** I often get this question from young ballet students who are anxious to make that step into the ballet program. Here are some basic fundamentals to understanding what is necessary to be ready for pointe:

- **Age-** I believe that it is better to wait to at least the age of 12 to make certain that the growth plates in the bones have sufficiently developed to help prevent injury to them. There is no real advantage to beginning pointe work earlier than age 12. Having more strength and coordination only means that the pointe work will progress much faster.
- **Strength-** not in the obvious way we normally think of but, in the small muscle groups that articulate rotation in the hip joints, the entire chain of muscles that are connected to the foot both for ankle and metatarsal strength and the deep core. These muscles take a very long time to condition, usually takes years of good training and multiple classes per week.



- **Alignment-**correct pelvic position is necessary to properly use the rotation. The ability to keep the torso taut and vertical while balancing on the ball of a foot is key in having the right position for turning. Ankle alignment (straight line from the middle of the kneecap, through the center of the ankle ending at the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> toe) is paramount for preventing injury. Arm position is related to the use of the back muscles to aid in stability of the torso and again in having proper balance for turns and jumps.
- **Coordination-**the ability to use a number of muscles in concert to affect a movement pattern. Ballet requires the use of specific muscles to work in intricate patterns (i.e. arms move 4x slower than the legs or arms move inwardly as leg move outwardly).
- **Articulation-** the ability to fully articulate the joints of the legs and feet such that they can be flexed separately akin to being able to move one's shoulder separately from one's ribcage. The need for this ability is because in pointe work the foot has to engage the joints at different times, often a split-second apart to achieve the correct movement.
- **Control-**This is a combination of strength and coordination but includes the self-control aspect of not doing things the easy way. I say this because, as I tell my students, turnout is your friend. What our bodies want to do when facing a challenge on pointe (turn the legs in, round our backs, bend our knees) are all the things that won't help! So having the wherewithal to make yourself engage good technique while doing a challenging movement is key.