



PRE-SEASON PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

Recommendations for incoming students from the Director of Training

Welcome to the Academy of Circus Arts. This sheet provides you with a basic routine of pre-season conditioning and the rationale behind it.

ALL circus skills require high levels of strength, flexibility and aerobic fitness. Your circus training will include a rigorous daily physical-conditioning program that will assist you in reaching and maintaining your ideal fitness levels. Bear in mind that your work ethic and adherence to a fitness routine will determine how far you progress during the relatively short ACA course.

The more work you do to develop your overall fitness between now and the start of your training, the easier you will find the training and the more you will be able to get out of it. If you are strong and fit when you start, you'll have more time and energy to devote to the fun part of training: developing your skills and acts!

If you should decide to join a gym or employ a personal trainer, ask them to design a program for you that will develop muscular strength, endurance and flexibility.

Your training program should look something like this:

STRENGTH TRAINING:

4 times a week (start with 2x a week and build up to 4x).

Try to use a combination of weight machines, free weights and body weight exercises; circuit classes are good general choices.

Make sure you leave at least 24 hours between training sessions (i.e. when just starting out, don't do strength training on consecutive days, as your body needs time to recover in order to get stronger).

CARDIOVASCULAR / AEROBIC EXERCISE:

4-5- times a week (start with 3 x a week) 20-60 minutes of any continuous CV activity; e.g. running/jogging, aerobics class, swimming, cycling (or "spinning"), skipping rope, rowing machine, etc.

Try to use a variety of different activities so you don't develop muscular imbalances and also so you don't get bored!

When you can do 20 minutes continuously try adding some interval training: For example, warm-up, then run as fast as you can for 2 minutes and jog or walk briskly to recover for 2-3 minutes; continue repeating this run / jog pattern for at least 20 minutes, then cool down. *NOTE: Interval training has been proven to be a more effective fat-burning program than non-stop aerobic activity as well!*

FLEXIBILITY:

Every day! Flexibility = range of motion = strength!!!

The importance of muscular flexibility or suppleness cannot be stressed enough. Lack of flexibility is the greatest challenge facing new circus students and is, therefore, *the most important part of your training program!* Work on it now to increase your range of motion and strength and to prevent injury. It is best to begin the course with full splits on at least one side and ideally all three (right & left legs + center).

Make sure you stretch after every training session. In a complete stretching program you should be working from one end of your body to the other (toes – ankles – calves – hamstrings – quadriceps – glutials – lower back – abdominals – obliques – shoulders – forearms – wrists – upper back - neck) and your routine should include a pike-stretch, straddle-stretch, butterfly-stretch and bridge-stretch in this routine. Hold your stretches for *at least* 30-60 seconds to improve your flexibility (If you have trouble with your bridge or backbend stretch, try setting your feet on a higher surface such as a stair step or have a friend assist you by lifting at your shoulders as you bridge holding their ankles.).

If you really need to improve your flexibility try also to incorporate 2-3 sessions each week where you only focus on flexibility (rather than just “tacking it onto” the end of a session when you are already tired); make sure you warm-up your muscles with some CV first.

REST:

One day a week should be a rest from training.

Your body needs some time in order to adapt to the training you are doing. You can also use the last week of each month as an ‘active recovery’ week. Don’t stop training, but try to do different activities from your normal routine; if you normally run, try going for a swim instead, or try rollerblading, rock-climbing or some other ‘fun’ activity. This should prevent overtraining and over-use injuries and ensure you stay motivated and enthusiastic about training!

General Note:

Make sure you warm-up for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of each training session and cool-down for 5-10 minutes at the end. The warm-up should feel fairly easy; it’s what prepares and protects your body – don’t skip it or you may risk injury. The cool-down should feel easy; it’s what helps you to recover faster and feel less tired and achy – don’t skip it unless you have a masochistic desire to suffer needless excruciating agony.

Simple Home Circuit

If you can't get to a gym and have no equipment you can still do this simple home circuit which will improve both your muscular strength and endurance and your aerobic capacity. Books or soup cans make nice hand-held weights when needed.

Warm-up

Mobilisation: Rotate hip, wrist and shoulder circles; head turns, elbow and knee curls, heel-toe rocks. Dancing like a maniac to your favourite "jump around" song is also effective as long as the song is over 2-minutes. It's also more fun...

Skipping: 500 jumps with a skipping rope (you can even jump without one).

Circuit

Upper Abdominal Crunches: 3x sets of 20 crunches with feet on the edge of a chair, knees bent at 90 degrees. Try to lift your shoulders off the ground and chin toward the ceiling.

Triceps Dips: 2x sets of 10 dips between two chairs keeping elbows into your sides and chest up (don't lean forward).

Squats: 2x sets of 20 keeping heels flat on floor and arms extended forward. To challenge yourself, try this exercise with feet at various widths apart (together / shoulder-width / far apart).

Push-Ups: 3 – 5x sets of 10 alternating positions (straight / fingers inward or "diamonds" / wide arms or "military"). Keep your head up and drop chest to floor (don't let your belly sag or try to put your nose to floor!)

Calf Raises: 15x each leg with toes on a stair edge. Make sure your heels are dropped below your toes for each raise and stretch calves after each set.

Bicep Curls: 3x sets of 10 curls lift a chair from the back or a dictionary (heavy book), keeping elbows against your side and curling arms into chest.

Lower Abdominal Crunches: 3-4x sets of 10 crunches. Lay face-up on floor and hold onto a bed-frame or a friend's ankles for stabilization. Keeping your entire back flat on floor, raise straight legs up and overhead to touch toes to bed or your friend's knees.

Military Press: 15x hold a heavy book flat on each palm at your shoulder (like holding a pizza tray), raise the books up over your head and back down slowly. Keep your back straight, stomach pulled in and try really hard not to drop the books on your head.

Run through the circuit doing one set of each exercise and moving to the next until you have completed all of your sets. Try to gradually increase the number of repetitions (or you can do as many repetitions as you are able to muscle fatigue).

Cool-Down

Walking with arm circles, etc 5 minutes or dance slowly to a favourite song.

Stretches

Hold all stretches for 15 – 30 seconds or longer.