

# The Nourished Dancer

SALLY HODGSON

Achieving optimal performance and longevity

## PART ONE





# Sally Hodgson

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### Hi Dancers!

I was raised in Perth and danced from a young age, I cannot imagine growing up without the opportunity to dance! The life skills I learnt through dancing have helped me in all aspects of my life including discipline, team work, perseverance and dedication.

I developed an interest in nutrition after suffering debilitating anxiety and panic attacks as a teenager. Adjusting my Nutritional habits played a large role in overcoming this difficult time in my life and also helped enormously during a period of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Since completing a Bachelor of Nutritional Medicine, I am able to blend my two loves of dance and nutrition together to provide a specialized service.

### Why Nutrition for Dancers?

Optimal nutrition is essential to a dancer's life, impacting energy, strength and recovery. Nutritional education is one of the most valuable skills that a dancer can learn at any stage.

If you are able to understand your body and how the food is functioning in your body, then you will be able to make informed decisions about your diet.

Holistic nutrition involves treating the whole person and includes all aspects of their being. It is amazing how all these components are closely intertwined and how dietary changes may have a large impact. Everyone is unique, otherwise we would all look and feel the same! This means that everyone's nutritional requirements are unique too.



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# All about you

Nutrition is all about you.

It's about learning the best types of food that provide **you** the fuel **you** need to reach **your** full potential.

There is one thing I can guarantee:

Following a diet that someone else has provided you will not help you to achieve optimal performance and longevity in dance.

Diets come complete with strict guidelines, foods to include and exclude, and specific times that you shall, or shall not, eat.

If you're not following a diet, then how do you eat?

This is the key! Developing internal skills and learning what works best for your body is the ultimate goal when it comes to nutrition. There are four pieces to the puzzle when developing your personalized nutrition.

A nourished dancer is once who has:

- A positive body image
- A healthy food relationship
- An understanding of self
- Foundational nutrition knowledge

These skills fit together like four pieces of a puzzle, they rely on each other to complete the picture. These skills don't appear overnight. Just like learning a new routine, they take time to develop. You try different techniques and angles until it feels right.

So be patient with yourself in your nutritional journey. Progress at a pace that feels right for you.

# It's not just food in, energy out

Nutrition is a topic that has continued to gain a lot of attention in recent years. It has become very clear that the age old saying, 'you are what you eat,' is absolutely spot on. Nutrition involves not only *what* we eat, but *how* we eat it. Other considerations include:

- The conditions in which food is grown. If the soil is rich with nutrients, so is the food grown in the soil.
- How our genetics play a role in the types of food we can, and cannot tolerate.
- Whether we are eating in a rush on the go, or sitting down and slowly eating our meal.

Yes, all of these things are a part of the bigger nutritional picture. The area continues to grow and evolve and it's a very exciting time to be a part of this area of science.

## What is nutrition?

Nutrition is the way in which the food we eat is broken down, absorbed into the body, and converted into energy for us to use.

It sounds pretty simple doesn't it?

There is so much happening within your body, every second of every day, to ensure that the nutrients derived from the food you eat are getting to all the necessary parts of your body. Your body is incredibly clever, working out what parts of the food are useful for the body, and eliminating the rest.

The nutrition that we obtain from our diet plays a vital role in all the functions that go on within our body. These functions range from growth and development, to keeping our immune system strong and our hormones healthy.

For dancers, good nutrition is a valuable skill to learn and understand as you progress through your training, development and career.



# Does nutrition really matter?

# Is it really that important for dancers?

Not convinced that nutrition is an essential component of enabling you to reach your full potential as a dancer?

Imagine this...

You are the principal ballet dancer in the company of your dreams (playing the role of Giselle for the Australian Ballet Company). You are about to go on for your first major show as a principle dancer, this is what you have been working towards for so many years.

But suddenly, you have stomach cramps and your stomach starts to churn. Was it something you ate? You can't really remember on the spot because you have just been grabbing what you can all day to get through - a snack bar here and there, one that a friend gave you because its their favourite. You remember having a sandwich and some fruit from the kiosk at lunch as you knew you needed fuel to get through the day after all! You of course push this aside and perform at your best.

However, could you have performed even better, had that extra 'spark' if your stomach had not been playing up? Or, at least you would have *felt* better while performing!

Identifying the nutrition that works best for **you and your performance** is an important aspect of the equation. By the time you are ready for your performances and shows, your nutrition should be second nature. By this time, you are aware of what your body needs because you have practiced this in class and rehearsal. Preparing your nutrition for the day is just another task like sewing your ribbons, you just know what to do. Your meals and snacks are packed for the day, and you know in the back of your mind your 'go to' options if you feel like you need something more.



**Enjoy the benefits  
(and taste)  
of good quality  
nutrition**

# Day to day counts even more

Now that we have established how important performance nutrition is, we can focus on that, perfect it, and we are good to go right?

Not quite...

Day to day nutrition is the foundation of a great performance. The performance day nutrition is the icing on the cake.

Think back to when you started to dance. Did you start with grand allegro? Or, did you start with learning how to point your toes?

Grand allegro is not going to look very good if you don't know how to point your toes. So you spent a lot of time working on pointing your toes over and over again until it was second nature. Between pointing your toes and grand allegro, there are many different skills that you have learnt to enable you to execute grand allegro. All of these skills build on one another and it takes consistency and practice to eventually perform your grand allegro.

Nutrition works the same way.

While performance nutrition is important and vital for a dancer, you can't truly find what works best for you until you have established what works for you in a day to day routine. Your day to day routine is pointing your toes, your performance nutrition is your grand allegro.

If there was one magic diet that was guaranteed to work for every dancer and it promised you the greatest performance you could imagine, then we would all be following it.

Personal nutrition is different for everyone, and finding what works for you and your body is an area worth investing in.



# The Building Blocks

# Lets get into it

This section will provide you with the foundations of nutritional knowledge. As i mentioned earlier, we can't skip ahead to grand allegro before learning how to point your feet first.

This does not mean you have to know every intricate detail about nutrition, but having a foundation knowledge is very useful.

Think of the foundation knowledge like a tool box. Once you have the tools that you need, you can take them out at any time when they are appropriate for a certain job.

By providing you the tools for your toolbox, you are empowered to use this toolbox whenever you feel it is appropriate. Different tools come in handy for different jobs, just like your day to day class nutrition may differ from your long day rehearsal nutrition.

There is little value in me telling you that you should eat oats for breakfast because they are good for you. Why? What is this bowl of oats actually going to do for me, and how is it going to help me improve my dance performance?

# The Macronutrients

## What are they?

The three macronutrients are:

- Carbohydrates
- Protein
- Fat

They are named **macronutrients**, as we require all three, in large amounts, every day. Carbohydrates, protein, and fat, are the body's source of fuel. They provide us the energy we require each day to not only dance, but to carry out every other function that the body must do to keep us alive and well.

## Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the main source of fuel for the body, helping to provide energy to our muscles, nervous system and brain.

Carbohydrates are broken down into simple, and complex carbohydrates.

Complex carbohydrates are more beneficial to include in your meals and snacks day to day as they provide a slow and consistent release of energy which helps to maintain your energy throughout the day.

Sources of complex carbohydrates include:

- Fruit
- Starchy vegetables
- Whole grains
- Whole wheat
- Oats
- Rice
- Quinoa
- Barley
- Buckwheat
- Beans

# The Macronutrients

## Protein

Protein is the body's building block. Similar to the thousands of bricks it takes to build a house, the body requires a lot of protein to grow, develop, and remain strong.

Protein is essential for the maintenance of our muscles, blood, hormones, hair, skin, and nails. Including a portion of protein at each meal will help provide a constant supply of protein to the body and help you feel satisfied in between meals.

Sources of protein include:

- Beans and lentils
- Nuts and seeds
- Eggs
- Yogurt
- Tofu

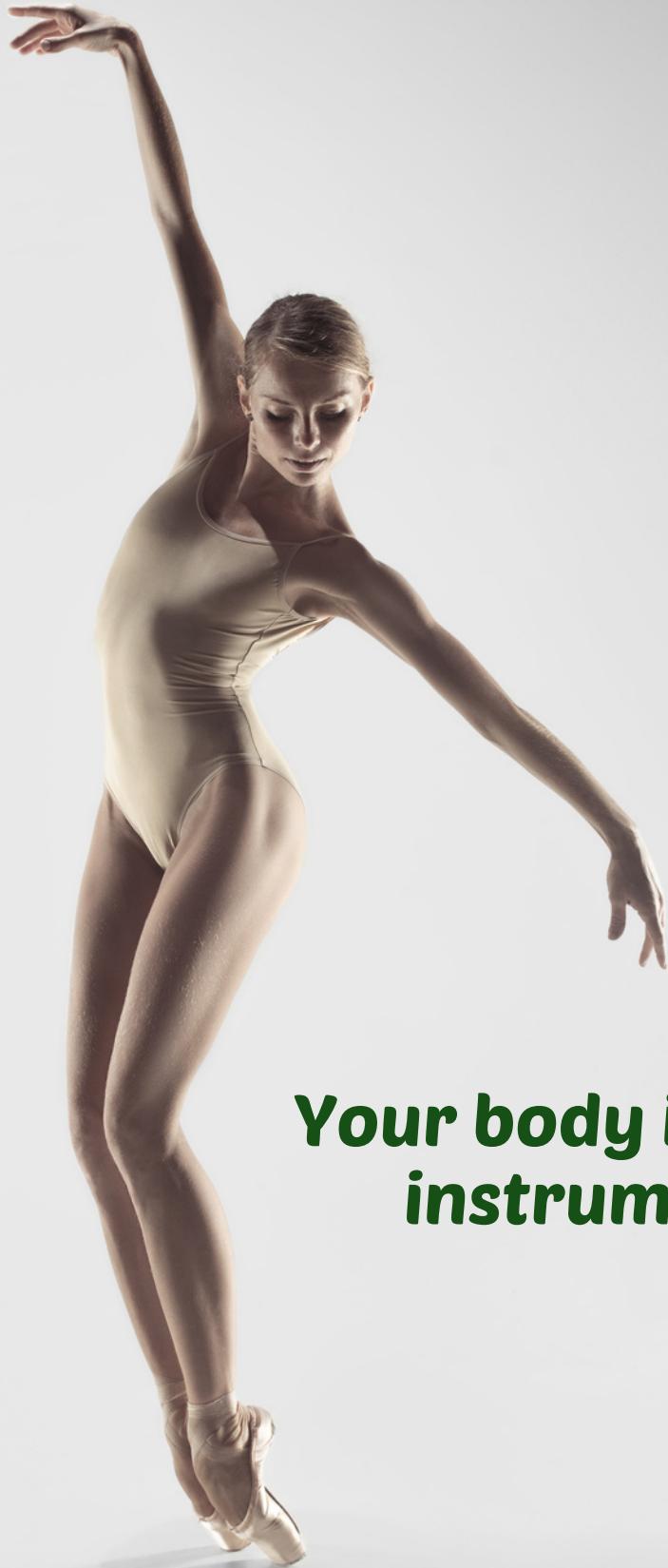
Animal meats including beef, chicken, turkey and fish.

## Fat

Fat is a component of every single cell in your body! So we must include fat in the diet to maintain overall health. Some of our essential vitamins are fat soluble, which means that they can only be absorbed if we are including sources of fat in the diet. These include vitamins A, D, E and K.

Sources of fat include:

- Eggs
- Avocado
- Olives (and olive oil)
- Nuts and seeds
- Full fat dairy products (lactose free if required)
- Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, tuna)



**Your body is your  
instrument**

# The smaller ones are just as essential!

## Micronutrients

The micronutrients are the vitamins and minerals, and are required by the body in smaller amounts than the macronutrients. They are required in smaller amounts as they don't provide us with energy. However they do enable the body to convert our food into energy efficiently and effectively.

These vitamins and minerals cannot be produced by the body and therefore we must include a wide range in our diet.

Vitamins and minerals help all aspects of our body including our growth and development, supporting our immune system, balancing hormone levels, helping our memory and concentration levels, and supporting our body to heal and repair when necessary.

A diet containing a wide range of fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains and meats will ensure that we are providing the body with all these necessary nutrients to help it perform at its best.

Here's the catch..

So why can't you just take a multivitamin to get all of these nutrients, and then eat whatever you want?

Yes, there was a point in time that I thought this was a great solution, and how easy would that make things! However, its just not the same. While a multivitamin may help to fill any gaps that may be in your diet, it is not a substitute for the wholefoods in your diet. Wholefoods contain many different forms of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, and of course the fibre, that cannot be replicated in pill form.

# Part One of Three

**Thank you** for reading Part One of The Nourished Dancer's eBook.

If you enjoyed this edition, I have great news for you!

There are two more in this series, so stay tuned to receive these.

My vision is for all dancers to understand fundamental nutritional requirements to fuel their dancing, while building a healthy relationship with food.

Please remember that your needs are unique and if you are experiencing concerns about your dietary habits, please seek professional guidance.

If you would like to reach out and contact me, please do!

Kindest Regards,

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