

A typical day in the life of a ballet dancer

October 28, 2020



It's not all tutus and glittery makeup: dancer Naomi Hibberd's day revolves around eating endless avocados and a lot of other high-energy food.

As well as avocados, there are nuts, fruit, meat, vegetables, curries and stir fries on her daily menu to get enough long-lasting energy to make it through from wake-up until midnight when she's performing. And sugary foods just don't do the job.

Ms Hibberd is one of Australia's most recognisable dancers, performing with organisations including Opera Australia, The National Dance Theatre of Australia and Sydney Dance Theatre. She was a principal dancer in a European tour of a production of Peter and the Wolf, was a dancer in Dance Academy The Movie and has performed in and choreographed music videos and advertisements.

She's also the star of an episode of the Who's In the Lift online series by the Sydney Opera House, in which children interview dancers, musicians and technicians about their jobs.

To celebrate World Ballet Day on October 29, Kids News asked Ms Hibberd about a typical day and some questions about what it's like being a dancer. Here's what she had to say.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A DANCER?

I enjoy the feeling of moving, I always loved the sensation of moving around and I get to do it all day. I love the exploring of stories and characters as well, it's like being an actress.

WHAT IS THE HARDEST PART OF BEING A DANCER?

I love my early bedtime so sometimes staying up late to do shows can be the hardest part. Often a show won't finish 'til 10.30pm some nights so I don't get to bed until midnight.

DO YOU GET REALLY TIRED?

I do but your body gets used to the amount of work and the more you do it, the easier it becomes so it can be harder after a holiday like Christmas.

I make sure I eat plenty of food throughout the day, whenever I have a break really. I have long sleeps to a full eight hours and always make sure I warm up and cool down before and after a day of dancing.

DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO EAT HEALTHY FOOD?

I try to eat healthy but for me it is eating food that will give me long-burning energy such as meat and brown carbohydrates. Not too much sugar for me as I know that 30 minutes after I eat it I will be really tired again. I love avocados so I eat a lot of avocados as well.

DO YOU GET NERVOUS?

I used to get nervous and I would always take three deep, slow breaths to try and calm my nerves. Also going over all of the steps side stage just before I went on to make sure I felt 100 per cent prepared.

I don't really get nervous much anymore as I have performed so much that it has become normal to me. (It's like being nervous for your first day of school but after a while you don't get nervous to go to school anymore.)

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL IN BALLET? HAS THAT CHANGED OVER TIME?

My goal was always to have amazing legs and feet but at a certain age I realised that I had to be happy with the legs and feet that I had and learn how to adapt certain things to make them look better. I also focused on my arms and upper body more as I realised that was my strength.

Performance is now my biggest goal. I would like to be the best performer I can be as I find that really exciting.

NAOMI'S TYPICAL DAY

- **6am:** I will wake up at 6am, have breakfast, which is usually toast with avocado and a coffee. Get ready for the day, pack a few different varieties of dance clothes as well as different shoes. I take my dog out for a long walk along the bay. Make sure I have enough snacks for throughout the day.
- **9am:** Ballet class for 1.5 hours. Break for 15 minutes – I usually eat fruit or nuts.
- **10.45am or 11am:** Start rehearsal for whatever show is next.
- **1pm:** Lunch break for an hour. I sometimes have a shower here to freshen up if I have been working really hard. I will usually have a decent lunch like a big salad with meat or a toasted sandwich of some kind or even last night's dinner leftovers.
- **2pm:** More rehearsals of performance.
- **5pm:** I will sometimes teach ballet to kids or if not I usually go to the park again with my dog and do some extra business work.
- **7.30pm:** Dinner — meat and vegetables, maybe stir fry, curry (I eat everything).
- **8pm:** Shower and a bit of a stretch and cool down for the day.
- **9.30pm or 10pm:** In bed.

And do it all again the next day!