



Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917). *Dancer*. Photo Credit: Art Resource, NY.

More than half of Degas's prodigious oeuvre translated the working lives of dancers. But he preferred to show "unobserved" movements—of dancers off stage, laundresses at the sink, bathers in the tub. His subjects stretched after exertion, yawned in fatigue, balanced on one foot to rub the sole of the other. In this painting (most likely pastel, charcoal, and chalk on paper and dating from the 1880s), a dancer bends almost impossibly forward, apparently stretching her spinal extensor and hamstring muscles, and perhaps tying her ballet slipper. Sashes were rarely worn by dancers, so some believe that Degas used the blue bow only to bring color into an otherwise muted scene; but the sash also serves to emphasize her flexibility.

Research Reports

- 156 **Scales to Assess the Quality of Randomized Controlled Trials: A Systematic Review** / Susan Armijo Olivo, Luciana Gazzi Macedo, Inae Caroline Gadotti, Jorge Fuentes, Tasha Stanton, David J Magee
- 176 **Measuring Deterioration in International Classification of Functioning Domains of People With Multiple Sclerosis Who Are Ambulatory** / Jaana Paltamaa, Taneli Sarasoja, Esko Leskinen, Juhani Wikström, Esko Mälkiä
- 191 **Health Care Providers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Self-efficacy for Working With Patients With Spinal Cord Injury Who Have Diverse Sexual Orientations** / Annlee Burch
- 199 **Interventions Used by Physical Therapists in Home Care for People After Hip Fracture** / Kathleen Kline Mangione, Rosalie B Lopopolo, Nancy P Neff, Rebecca L Craik, Kerstin M Palombaro
- 211 **Predictive Value of the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index for the Amount of Physical Activity After Total Hip Arthroplasty** / Robert Wagenmakers, Martin Stevens, Inge van den Akker-Scheek, Wiebren Zijlstra, Johan W Groothoff
- 219 **Estimation of Thigh Muscle Mass With Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Older Adults and People With Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease** / Sunita Mathur, Karen PR Takai, Donna L MacIntyre, Darlene Reid
- 231 **Effects of Education on Return-to-Work Status for People With Fear-Avoidance Beliefs and Acute Low Back Pain** / Joseph J Godges, Marie A Anger, Grenith Zimmerman, Anthony Delitto
- 240 **Gaze Control and Foot Kinematics During Stair Climbing: Characteristics Leading to Fall Risk in Progressive Supranuclear Palsy** / Richard P Di Fabio, Cris Zampieri, Paul Tuite

- 251 **Effect of Focus of Attention and Age on Motor Acquisition, Retention, and Transfer: A Randomized Trial** / Michal Emanuel, Tal Jarus, Orit Bart
- 261 **Influence of Feedback Schedule in Motor Performance and Learning of a Lumbar Multifidus Muscle Task Using Rehabilitative Ultrasound Imaging: A Randomized Clinical Trial** / Wendy J Herbert, Deborah Givens Heiss, D Michele Basso
- 270 **Implementing an Integrated Electronic Outcomes and Electronic Health Record Process to Create a Foundation for Clinical Practice Improvement** / Daniel Deutscher, Dennis L Hart, Ruth Dickstein, Susan D Horn, Moshe Gutvitz
- 286 **Interrater Reliability of the Movement Assessment Battery for Children** / Bouwien CM Smits-Engelsman, Marlene J Fiers, Sheila E Henderson, Leslie Henderson

Reviews

- 295 **Spinal Deformities: The Essentials**

Departments

- 297 **Scholarships, Fellowships, and Grants**
News from the Foundation for Physical Therapy
- 299 **Product News**
- 300 **Ad Index**

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