

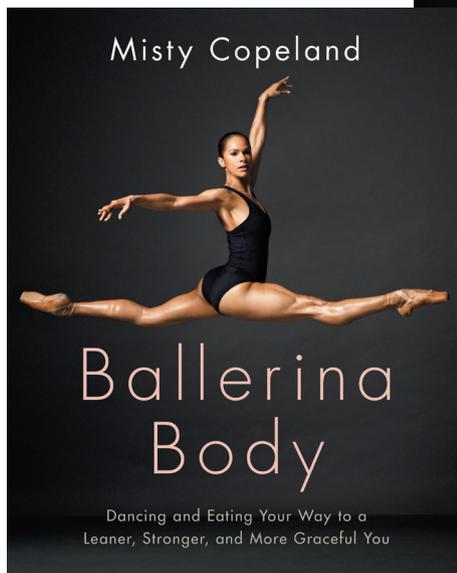
# DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

This month, world-renowned, barrier-busting ballerina **Misty Copeland** imparts her wisdom on building strength—mind, body, and soul

When Misty Copeland took her first ballet class, she was 13 years old, living in a Sunset Inn room in Gardena, California, with her five siblings and single mother. Now, in the last three years alone, the American Ballet Theatre principal dancer has served on former president Barack Obama's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition; starred in a viral ad campaign for Under Armour; and made a hilarious appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* as the talk-show host's strict ballet instructor. "Keep the legs in front of you," she chastises a tutu-clad Kimmel after an attempted emboîté. "That looked a little bit like the Running Man."

At 34, Copeland has garnered the kind of mainstream fame that few (if any) classical ballet dancers do, a result of what President Obama called her "sheer force of will and determination and incredible talent and hard work" in a joint conversation with *Time*. As a first-time dancer at 13, Copeland was six or seven years older than most beginning ballerinas who go on to have successful careers. Nevertheless, she went on to train with the San Francisco Ballet School, and later in American Ballet Theatre's Summer Intensive program; join the prestigious ABT company in 2001 as a member of the corps de ballet, and the only African American woman in a company of 80 dancers; and, in 2015, become the company's first-ever black female principal dancer, the highest rank within a dance company. This spring, Copeland will perform her dream role for the first time: Kitri, the "sassy Spanish girl" in the ballet *Don Quixote*. "This is for the little brown girls," she writes in her 2014 memoir, *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*.

For a ballet dancer, constant critique isn't unusual, but Copeland, in particular, has



become painfully familiar with being told—by strangers as well as potential employers—that she isn't the right body type for her profession: too muscular, too "big." It's a refrain that, over the years, Copeland has become increasingly vocal in combating, for one main reason. "There have always been curvy and muscular dancers," she says. "I truly believe that the focus on my body type has a lot to do with my race. A lot of dancers who are a minority—especially African American—experience being told that they don't have the [right] bodies. It's because they don't want to use those words: 'You don't have the right skin color.'"

Copeland's new book, *Ballerina Body: Dancing Your Way to a Leaner, Stronger, and More Graceful You* (Grand Central Life & Style), may have the title of a classic fitness book, but it's much more than that. Copeland



powerfully tackles issues of race, body image, and mental and physical recovery through her own deeply personal stories, interspersed between practical techniques such as visualization and stretches that encourage good posture. She draws on her own early-career trial-and-error strategies that led her to the physical, mental, and eating habits she relies on today—respectively: low-resistance cross-training, like swimming and Pilates; daily mindfulness exercises; and sticking to a pescatarian, soda-free diet.

Above all, Copeland hopes to promote self-kindness alongside perseverance—and all April long on ELLE.com, she can e-hold your hand as you work through her weekly steps toward a cleaner, clearer emotional and physical self. "A lot of it is about having a strong mind," she says, "and knowing that even if you do something one day that you're not proud of, the next day is another day to make it better. We can become better human beings every day."—*Keziah Weir*

**THE BIG REBOOT**  
VISIT ELLE.COM EACH WEEK FOR COPELAND'S EXCLUSIVE LESSONS IN HOLISTIC FITNESS



**APRIL 3 MIND MATTERS**  
Start your month with Copeland's three-step mental cleanse using specific visualizations, affirmations, and the unparalleled mental magic of writing down your goals.

**APRIL 10 STRAIGHT AND NARROW**  
Copeland's stretches produce posture your grandma would approve of. To start, "Clasp your hands behind you, and then stretch them down and away from your body," Copeland advises.

**APRIL 17 FOOD INCORPORATED**  
Learn how to make one of Copeland's favorite protein-packed granola recipes. It's so good we'd call it dessert—if it weren't so good for you.

**APRIL 24 WORK IT OUT**  
This week, Copeland serves up two of her most effective injury-prevention moves: a ballerina sit-up, and the equestrian-inspired "posting." (No horse required.)

