

Reprint

The Health Benefits of Dancing --

Including Specific Benefits of Different Dances

by www.SixWise.com

If you secretly sashay across your living room when you're home alone or long to cha-cha with your significant other, you're in luck. Not only is dancing an exceptional way to let loose and have fun, but it also provides some terrific benefits for your health.

In fact, Mayo Clinic researchers reported that social dancing helps to:

- ◆ Reduce stress
- ◆ Increase energy
- ◆ Improve strength

And whether you like to kick up your heels to hip hop, classical or country, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) says that dancing can:

- ◆ Lower your risk of coronary heart disease
- ◆ Decrease blood pressure
- ◆ Help you manage your weight
- ◆ Strengthen the bones of your legs and hips

Dancing is a unique form of exercise because it provides the heart-healthy benefits of an aerobic exercise while also allowing you to engage in a social activity. **This is especially stimulating to the mind, and one 21-year study published in the New England Journal of Medicine even found dancing can reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia in the elderly.**

In the study, participants over the age of 75 who engaged in reading, dancing and playing musical instruments and board games once a week had a 7 percent lower risk of dementia compared to those who did not. Those who engaged in these activities at least 11 days a month had a 63 percent lower risk!



Dancing the night away can burn more calories per hour than riding a bike or swimming.

Interestingly, dancing was the only physical activity out of 11 in the study that was associated with a lower risk of dementia. Said Joe Verghese, a neurologist at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and a lead researcher of the study, "This is perhaps because dance music engages the dancer's mind."

Verghese says dancing may be a triple benefit for the brain. Not only does the physical aspect of dancing increase blood flow to the brain, but also the social aspect of the activity leads to less stress, depression and loneliness. Further, dancing requires memorizing steps and working with a partner, both of which provide mental challenges that are crucial for brain health.

How Good of a Workout is Dancing, Really?

The amount of benefit you get from dancing depends on, like most exercises, the type of dancing you're doing, how strenuous it is, the duration and your skill level.

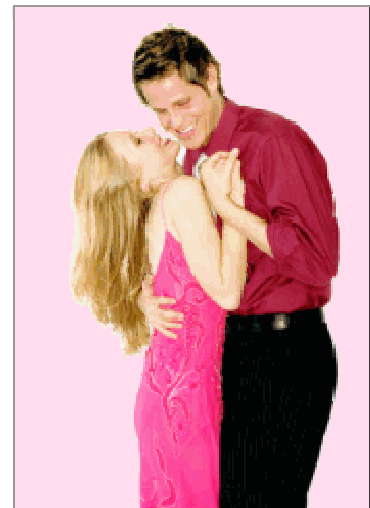
Says exercise physiologist Catherine Cram, MS, of Comprehensive Fitness Consulting in Middleton, Wisconsin, "Once someone gets to the point where they're getting their heart rate up, they're actually getting a terrific workout. Dance is a weight-bearing activity, which builds bones. It's also "wonderful" for your upper body and strength."

Plus, dancing requires using muscles that you may not even know you had.

"If you're dancing the foxtrot, you're taking long, sweeping steps backwards. That's very different than walking forward on a treadmill or taking a jog around the neighborhood ... Ballroom dancing works the backs of the thighs and buttock muscles differently from many other types of exercise," says Ken Richards, professional dancer and spokesman for USA Dance, the national governing body of DanceSport (competitive ballroom dancing).

Specific Benefits of Different Dances

If you're looking for specific health results, here's a breakdown of the benefits of some popular dances. Just remember that any type of dancing is better than no dancing at all!



Most people agree that social dancing gives them a more positive outlook on life.

Belly Dancing

- Improved posture and muscle toning
- Maintains flexibility
- Helps prevent lower back problems
- Tones and firms arms and shoulders
- Helps with weight loss
- Helps prepare women for childbirth
- Reduces stress

Ballroom Dancing

- Conditions the body
- Helps keep the heart in shape
- Builds and increases stamina
- Develops the circulatory system
- Strengthens and tones legs and body
- Increases flexibility and balance
- Helps with weight loss
- Relieves stress

Salsa Dancing

- Builds endurance and stamina
- Helps with weight loss
- Relieves stress
- Helps you release toxins via sweating
- May help lower blood pressure and improve cholesterol levels
- Can lead to a reduced heart rate over time

Square Dancing

- Provides cardiovascular conditioning
- May lead to a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure and an improved cholesterol profile
- Strengthens bones
- Helps you develop strong social ties
- Loosens and tones muscles

Physical benefits aside, dancing has a way of brightening up a person's day, says ballroom owner and operator Karen Tebeau.

"A lot of times, when people come into the studio, it's because there's been a change in their life: a divorce or they've been through a period of depression. They (continue) coming in, and

Dancing Off Those Calories

How many calories will you burn while dancing? That depends on the type of dancing. Here's a range of some of the most popular varieties, based on a 150-pound person, per hour:

- Swing dancing: 235 calories/hour
- Ballroom dancing: 265
- Square dancing: 280
- Ballet: 300
- Belly dancing: 380
- Salsa dancing: 420+
- Aerobic dancing: 540+

you see a big change. After a while, they're walking in with a sunny expression. You know it's the dancing that's doing that," she says.

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