



Dance your way to fitness

Francesca Lazzari and Emanuele Pappacena

Fitness

Whatever style—ballroom, hip hop, Bollywood, square dancing or other—you'll get your heart pumping and feet moving.
By Theresa Gawlas Medoff
Photographs by Joe del Tufo

What if you could get a cardiovascular workout, train your brain, boost your mood and maybe even improve your social life—all with one activity? Well, just put on those dancing shoes and get out on the floor, because dance is one type of exercise that has it all.

Dancing gets your heart pumping and your lungs expanding. It strengthens your bones and muscles, improves your balance and posture (have you ever seen a ballerina slouch?), reduces stress, builds confidence and, if you dance in the company of others, gives you a social outlet, as well.

"Dance complements my fitness regime of walking, working out at the gym and watching what I eat," says Wanda Spiering, president of USA Dance, Dover chapter, a ballroom dancing group. "You get to use every part of your body when dancing. I was thinking that I'd feel better health-wise after I began dancing—more strength in my legs and better blood flow to my heart—but I wasn't expecting the mental benefits. I can be really tired after work on a Friday night, but within a half an hour of dancing, I'm re-energized. When you're dancing, you're thinking about the dance steps and the music, and you really don't have time to think about problems at work or home."

Not All Are Created Equal

Dancing is an aerobic exercise, and the faster the style of dance, the more you'll get your heart going and the more calories you'll burn. It's all about the beats per minute of the music, says Beth Jordan, a certified personal trainer and spokeswoman for the American Council on Exercise (ACE). Fast-paced choreography in dance-style classes like Zumba, Jazzercise and cardio-kick-box gives you a great workout, she says, but more traditional dance can, too. She points to dance styles like salsa, hip hop and transdance, which is a fusion of different dance styles, including crank, African dancing, salsa, rumba and hip hop.

Bollywood, another type of fusion dance—it combines Eastern and Western styles—also provides a great workout, says Nisha Punjabi, owner of Dance Jhankaar in Hockessin and Newark. Bollywood dance combines various Indian classical and folk styles, waltz, ballroom, salsa, freestyle, disco, belly dance, African dance and more.

"Bollywood dance gets your entire body moving from head to toe—eyes, neck, fingers, shoulders, chest, waist, hips, knees, ankles. It's almost like they all move in different directions, yet there's a unity among them," Punjabi says.

Because you're moving so many body parts in unfamiliar ways, Bollywood choreography can be a challenge for Americans who weren't raised on Indian and classical dance. That's why Punjabi invented "Bolly Fitness," which attracts non-Indian students. "Bolly Fitness is more like a Zumba class, but it's Bollywood-based," she explains. The instructor leads, and class members simply follow the dance steps as they are called out—no need to remember a long choreographed routine.

The rate at which you burn calories while dancing varies by dance style. According to TheCalorieCounter.net, you'll burn the most calories per hour—465—with hip-hop and other club style dances. Fast-paced tango, step dancing, polka, contra and country can burn 405 calories per hour. Swing dancing and folk styles like Greek, flamenco, hula and belly dancing will burn 378 calories per hour, while slower-paced dances like ballroom, waltz and foxtrot use up some 200 calories per hour. Wii's "Just Dance 2" burns an average of 250 to 300 calories per hour.

These calorie counts are simply a guideline, however. The amount you'll actually burn depends on your weight and fitness level as well as on how fast and how intensely you dance, and how well you know the steps, Jordan says. As you learn the steps better, you'll tend to do them faster, which burns more calories.

"I feel wonderful after dancing," Siftar says.

"You're actually training your body to do a lot of things, which is another cool thing about dance, because you think you're in there just having fun and getting sweaty and it's upbeat and the music's great and the instructors hopefully are very good, and so you don't really think, 'I'm getting a workout.' People benefit from the fun factor with dancing," Jordan says.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

With so many different styles of dance, there's something for each person's fitness level and health. Elizabeth Siftar of Wilmington had always been active—playing tennis, hiking, biking and dancing. But a few years ago she injured her knee and had to wear a brace for several months. During this same time, she was diagnosed with osteoporosis of the spine. She wanted to get back into a fitness routine, but the doctors told her she'd have to forgo tennis and mountain biking, since neither was good for her knee. Then she asked about square dancing, which she had enjoyed with 2x4's Square Dance Club of Newark before she was injured. The doctors said yes. It was

fine for her knee, and the weight-bearing aspects of dancing would actually benefit her osteoporosis treatment.

"I have been happily square dancing, sometimes two or three times a week, for the last several years," Siftar says. "I always feel wonderful after dancing and enjoy the health benefits of this wonderful form of exercise."

Ballroom dance is another style suited to all ages. Ballroom is a catchall phrase for a multitude of partnered dance styles, says Peter Ennis, owner of Take the Lead Dance Studio in Hockessin. It can include foxtrot, waltz, tango, salsa, samba, merengue and the hustle—"everything from what you'd see in a nightclub to more formal wedding stuff," Ennis says.

Dancers range in age from 20s to 80s at Take the Lead, though most are middle-aged. The oldest dancers at the studio were in their mid-90s. "I've had people in their 80s who can barely get up the curb, but once they get on the dance floor, they're doing the foxtrot and the cha-cha," Ennis says.

He recommends a combination of group and individual dance lessons. In the private lessons, the teacher can provide individual attention. The group lessons, Ennis says, teach you to dance with—and adapt to—a variety of partners of differing abilities.

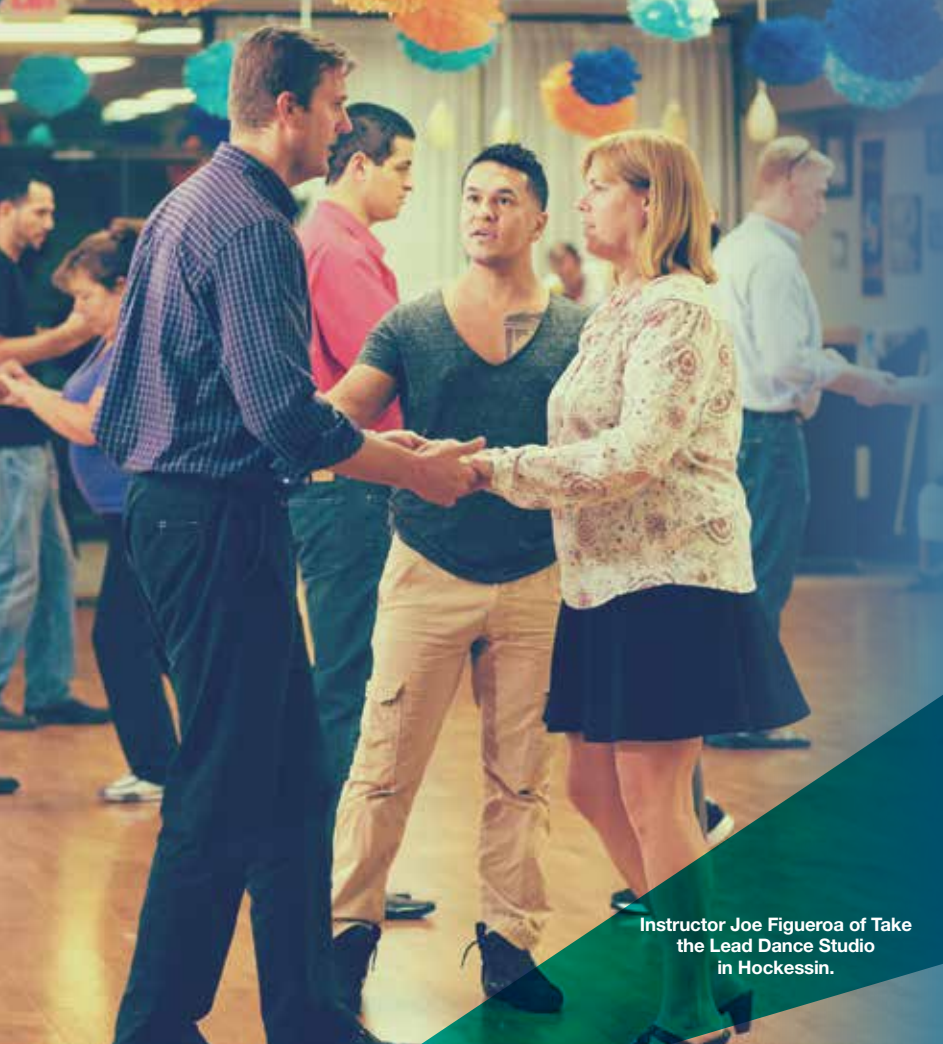
Your Brain on Dance

Dancing with a partner also has a health benefit: It's good for the brain. Whoever is leading has to actively make decisions about what to do next. For the partner, it's even more of a challenge—they need to anticipate and instantly respond to the lead. That split-second decision-making gives the brain a workout.

And you needn't worry if you don't have a ready dance partner. There are usually plenty of unattached dancers in classes and at events. "At our dances, two-thirds to three-quarters are couples, but the rest come partnerless," says Spiering, who met her husband 12 years ago through dance.

The brain is also put to work when you're square dancing and reacting to the caller's instructions or when you're taking a Zumba class and doing what the instructor says. Memorizing choreography challenges the brain as well.

"When you're dancing, there's a kinetic effect, a rational effect, musical, emotional—it's all wrapped up in one, and that really impacts the neural pathways, the connectivity going on in the brain," says Lee Jordan, Beth *continued on page 35*



Instructor Joe Figueroa of Take the Lead Dance Studio in Hockessin.

continued from page 29

Jordan's husband and also a certified personal trainer, health coach and spokesman for ACE. "So even with ballroom dancing that is not as intense cardio-wise, there's that added [mental] benefit."

In fact, dance is unique among forms of exercise for the brain boost it gives. In a landmark 2003 study published in the "New England Journal of Medicine," researchers followed 469 adults ages 75 and older for a median period of 5.1 years to see what sorts of activities were associated with a reduced risk of developing dementia. Of all the physical activities, only dance correlated with a decreased risk of developing dementia.

Participants in dance point to other mental benefits, too. "Dance exercises your personality, too. When you cha-cha, you need to smile, to throw your arms out. [Expressing these positive emotions] helps to combat depression," Ennis says.

Dance allows you to shift away from any anxiety you're feeling, agrees Punjabi. She likens Bollywood and other Indian dances to meditation. With the music playing and your concentration fully on what your hands and feet are doing, you can hold that focus, that meditative state, for 10 to 15 minutes, she says, adding, "I leave my class always feeling content and relaxed, and I find it easier to sleep."

Renove Medical
Regenerating Health Spa

- Now offering Micro-needling, to produce new collagen and skin resurfacing
- Cosmetic and Wellness services for men and women
- Enhance your health and appearance, without surgery
- Specializing in Bio-Identical Hormone Therapy
- PMS, thyroid disease, weight loss, acne, nutrition and vitamin analysis
- Non-invasive cosmetic procedures, Botox, Bellafill, Radisse, Voluma & Juvederm
- Ultherapy ultrasound technology that tightens and lifts loose facial and body skin
- Complete skin care, Skin Medica, Obagi, Revlon skin care lines, Skin and Laser treatments
- Consultations are complimentary
- Coolsculpt-Transform your body without surgery or downtime

416 Rehoboth Avenue
Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971
(302) 227-1079
www.RenoveMedSpa.org
info@renovemedspa.org

WILMINGTON BALLET Adult Ballet & Contemporary Dance Classes
Academy of the Dance INC. 1994

Tue & Thurs 9:30 am	Wed & Fri 10:00 am	Mon - Thurs 7:00 pm
------------------------	-----------------------	------------------------

Improve Posture • Great Muscle Toning
Comfortable & Welcoming Environment
Build Strength, Flexibility, Balance
Relaxing and Meditative
Beginners Welcome

"Educating dancers for life since 1956"

1709 Gilpin Avenue
Wilmington, DE 19806

302-655-1084
WilmingtonBallet.org