

# *Dancing for the Health of It*

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## *Educational Objectives*

- Participants will learn ways to improve their physical health by dancing.
- Participants will learn how dance can improve mental health and socialization.
- Participants will learn dance moves that help with flexibility, strength, balance, chronic disease and stress.

Harvard research found evidence that the health benefits of exercise are indisputable. Studies have proven that regular dancing activity builds



muscle and bone, reduces fat, increases aerobic capacity, lowers blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol. Dance can make you feel better physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. This builds self-assurance allowing to feel more confident about yourself and the world around you.

Dancing has been a part of human history for thousands of years. The first archaeological proof of dance comes from 9,000-year-old cave paintings in India. One of the earliest uses of structured dance was introduced in religious ceremonies that told the stories of ancient myths and gods. From ancient Greece and China to modern day America, each decade brought new moves and traditions. Dance is a way to exercise because it engages the mind and body while having fun! It is not seen as a hard workout, no gym or equipment needed, and dance moves are easily modified to meet individual needs and abilities. Beyond physical benefits, dancing can lift your mood, reduce stress and release negative emotions. Dancing is a perfect way to get moving and have fun while boosting your health. Here are ways dancing can benefit your overall health.

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## Physical Benefits

### Strength and Balance

Dancing builds muscle strength in almost every part of the body because you are moving in a way that requires your muscles to resist your body weight. Movement also increases bone strength and mass. It improves balance by helping you react faster with confidence and go about daily tasks with less chance of injury or falls.

Dance requires you to use balance as you move, step and turn. Your base of support changes with each movement, and your brain and body respond by enhancing your ability to adjust and maintain your balance as you move. Dance combines rhythm and balance with music, which enhances the benefits of movement. When steadying the body through dance steps, the muscles respond and over time you will feel stronger and have more energy.

### Flexibility, Mobility and Stiffness

As we age, we tend to lose the ability to move quickly and easily. Dancing helps you regain some of that agility by keeping joints loose and enabling more movement with less physical discomfort. Dancing enables adults to improve aerobic and muscle endurance, balance, agility and gait, according to a Journal of Aging and Physical Activity study.



Arthritis flare-ups are worse when someone has been sitting for too long. Dancing to gentle music is a great way to warm up stiff ligaments and joints and feel less pain. Research has proven that dance-based treatment led to a significant reduction in pain for people suffering from fibromyalgia, and adults with arthritis had less knee and hip pain and could walk faster after taking regular 45-minute dance classes.

### Lowers Risk of Chronic Diseases

Older adults who danced regularly had a 46% lower risk of dying from heart disease than those who rarely or never danced, according to an American Journal of Preventive Medicine study. Dance provides low-impact cardio at an activity level that produces many of the same heart benefits as traditional cardio exercises, (i.e., lowering blood pressure). Dancing provides a whole-body workout that results in calorie burn for weight management and lowers blood sugar levels, helping people with diabetes.

## Mental Benefits

### Social Interaction

Dancing is a great social activity. Whether in a dance class or at a celebration, you meet and interact with people and have fun together. People of all ages, sizes and abilities can get



together and enjoy a common interest. Couples or solo dancers can connect with others through ballroom dance, salsa, line dancing and Zumba!

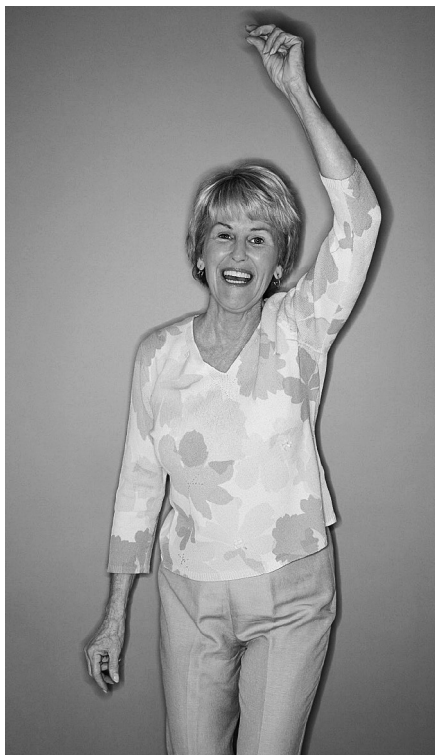
## Brain Health

Scientists have found that the areas of the brain that control memory and skills, such as planning and organizing, improve with exercise. A project through the Prevention Research Centers' Healthy Brain Research Network at the University of Illinois designed a Latin ballroom dance program for older sedentary adults. Participants reported improvements in memory, attention and focus after attending.

Research shows that one to two hours a week of dancing can improve cognitive skills. The memorization of steps and the focus required by dancing result in increased brain activity, which promotes better cognitive function. Learning new dance moves is mentally challenging. One must focus during lessons to learn where to place feet and arms. Once you know the steps, it is a challenge to remember them all!

## Stress and Mood

Dancing stimulates the production of feel-good hormones, like serotonin and endorphins, which make you more energized. Dancing has been proven to improve mood and lower depression.



Music is uplifting, and dancing serves as exercise. People can't help but smile when they're dancing to their favorite songs. Dancing allows you to clear your mind of stress and provides a break from your worries.

## Getting Started

- Visit your physician and follow their directions.
- Do warm-up stretches before any physical activity.
- Eat well to fuel your body.
- Stay hydrated.
- Listen to your body. Go at your own pace.
- Wear appropriate, well-fitting shoes to prevent falls.
- Have FUN!

## Simple Dances Through the Decades

1920s: The Charleston – [youtu.be/Mw858ql\\_tv4](https://youtu.be/Mw858ql_tv4)

1930s: The Jitterbug

1950s: Sock Hop, Boogie Woogie

1960s: Mashed Potato, The Twist, The Hand Jive – [youtu.be/eIozjNOgrm8](https://youtu.be/eIozjNOgrm8)

1970s: Y.M.C.A, The Hustle – [youtu.be/H41dZQ1t-tA](https://youtu.be/H41dZQ1t-tA) , <https://youtu.be/X50dnZi26gg>







**1980s:** Moonwalk, Breakdance, MC Hammer, The Cabbage Patch – [youtu.be/V6w\\_9vWXXjE](https://youtu.be/V6w_9vWXXjE)

**1990s:** The Macarena, Electric Slide – [youtu.be/-TjtAF1Rdxk](https://youtu.be/-TjtAF1Rdxk)

**2000s:** The Dougie, Cupid Shuffle, Wobble, Floss

## Club Activity

Have someone teach a couple dances to the group, then have a dance party!

Use the dance steps in the Participants Guide, or you can do an internet search for any dance you want to learn using words or phrases like “Electric Slide Dance Tutorial.”

## Resources

[www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/alzheimers-and-exercise.html](https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/alzheimers-and-exercise.html)

[medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000809.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000809.htm)

[health.gov/moveyourway](https://health.gov/moveyourway)

[bethesdahealth.org/blog/2021/10/27/12-health-benefits-of-dancing-for-seniors/](https://bethesdahealth.org/blog/2021/10/27/12-health-benefits-of-dancing-for-seniors/)

[YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

The Charleston: [youtu.be/Mw858ql\\_tv4](https://youtu.be/Mw858ql_tv4)

The Hand Jive: [youtu.be/eIozjNOgrm8](https://youtu.be/eIozjNOgrm8)

The Hustle: [youtu.be/H4ldZQ1t-tA](https://youtu.be/H4ldZQ1t-tA) , <https://youtu.be/X50dnZi26qg>

The Cabbage Patch: [youtu.be/V6w\\_9vWXXjE](https://youtu.be/V6w_9vWXXjE)

Electric Slide: [youtu.be/-TjtAF1Rdxk](https://youtu.be/-TjtAF1Rdxk)

*In memory of Olive Hager (1929-2023), a fiercely compassionate woman who loved life and never missed an opportunity to dance.*

2023

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