

Make Time for Dancing— It's Good for You!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A DANCER TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF DANCING.



Bust a move! Dancing is good for your physical, emotional and psychological well-being. Whether you freestyle it or opt for something more choreographed, you'll get your kicks and plenty of other perks.

Here's why you should dance.

Dance is a form of exercise that integrates the mind, body and soul, and it works for all ages and skill levels. For starters, it can help counteract the daily effects of sitting at a computer with a rounded spine as well as the infamous “text neck” from hunching over our phones, says Emily Sandow, dance physical therapist at NYU Langone Health’s Harkness Center for Dance Injuries. “Even at the beginner level, dance can activate the antigravity muscles of the neck and back and restore our posture.”

Dancing also lengthens and strengthens muscles and improves joint mobility. Plus, it can be a serious cardio workout. Sandow estimates that even a moderate-intensity class can burn an average of 400 calories, but there are benefits to all types of dancing. Freestyle is great because you can choose your music and forget about choreography and rules. Taking a class—with its defined steps and varied tempos—provides cognitive as well as balance challenges compared with repetitive-movement fitness training, such as walking or cycling.

Here's how to work dance into your routine.

There are so many ways to bring dance into your life. Sandow suggests finding classes at your local community center, gym or dance studio. Often you can find drop-in options for classes like Zumba, hip-hop, jazz, belly dancing, Masala Bhangra, ballet barre and tap. Or you could organize a group of friends to take a dance class together on weekends.

“If you simply cannot get out the door,” Sandow says, “there are plenty of options for dancing at home. Put on a video while doing a load of laundry. Find YouTube dance videos that teach choreography—just search by genre. You could try looking for apps and video games like Just Dance and Wii Fit for dance games.”

Here's what you need to dance.

Learning a new style of dance requires a dose of humility. Everyone was a beginner at some point, and some styles are easier to pick up than others. When starting a new class, Sandow suggests that you prepare by looking at the style online and trying some steps at home.

Then, decide what your goals are. Do you want to improve your fitness? Do you prefer to dance alone or with a partner? Do you enjoy fast or slow, high-impact or low-impact? Perhaps you want to return to a style you enjoyed when you were younger. If you studied ballet, tap or jazz as a child, good news: There’s a shorter learning curve! You’ve probably retained some muscle memory, so you should be able to pick up positions, phrases and sequences more easily.

And, remember, “Dance does not have to be technical; it can simply be a celebration of the body’s ability to move,” Sandow says. You don’t have to compare yourself to others, or even look in a mirror when you dance—just enjoy breaking loose with whatever movement feels right in the moment and you’ll reap the benefits of being active.

