

Dance your way to high level wellness! It is a lot of fun! People can dance in health clubs, dance halls/studios, and at home. To dance at home, just move your body to some lively music. Imagine doing a waltz step across the room or doing a slow, slow, quick, quick, slow to a tango beat! If the tango is not your cup of tea, try two-stepping (step-together-step). Research shows dancing (e.g., ballroom, square, folk, clog, and jazz) serves as an excellent form of aerobic exercise and providing cardiovascular conditioning. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute reports such conditioning lowers a person's risk of coronary heart disease, decreases blood pressure, and aids in weight management efforts. Because dancing is a weight-bearing activity, bone density can be improved along with muscle strength and balance. Other physical benefits to dancing include improvement in posture and balance and an increase in stamina and flexibility, which potentially lower a person's risk of falling!

Dancing is a great mind-body workout. Researchers are showing that regular physical activity such as dancing help keep the body, including the brain, healthy as one ages. Exercise increases the level of brain chemicals that encourage nerve cells to grow. Dancing requires remembering dance steps and sequences. This in turn helps improve memory skills. In square dancing, allemande left means to go left. Imagine what happens to a square in square dancing if one person goes to the right when the call is to allemande left! The Journal of Sports Science and Medicine found that teaching the cha-cha to a small group of older adults twice a week for six months was enough to improve their memory and cognitive function on a number of tests. Research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that ballroom dancing at least twice a week made people less likely to develop dementia.

Psychological benefits of dancing lead to successful aging! Dancing is enjoyable! Dancers find their stress lowered, chronic fatigue reduced, resulting in an increase in their energy level and their mood improved. Dancing offers opportunities to socialize and meet people. This helps increase one's self-confidence. The American Association of Retired Persons suggests that "Dancing can be magical and transforming. It can breathe new life into a tired soul; make a spirit soar; unleash locked-away creativity; unite generations and cultures; inspire new romances or rekindle old ones; trigger long-forgotten memories; and turn sadness into joy, if only during the dance." The Oregon Federation of Square and Round Dance Clubs emphasizes that dancers get exercise and have fun, too, whether doing di-si-dos to commands of a square dance caller or gliding across the dance floor to a waltz. Health benefits enumerated by this organization include [1] burning calories (half-hour of dancing can burn 200 to 400 calories); [2] cardiovascular fitness; [3] stronger bones; [4] rehabilitation from surgery; [5] sociability; [6] healthy environments (no alcohol or smoking); [7] body and brain coordination; [8] estimated that a typical square dancer can expect to clock 9,000 to 10,000 steps per dance; [9] stress relief by focusing on dance commands; and [10] mental health.

Dancing brings people together across communities, creating solidarity, tolerance and understanding. Dance classes can be found at a dance school, dance studio, health club, senior activity centers, or community recreation centers. Some YMCAs, churches, and synagogues offer group dance classes followed by a social hour. Don't know which type of dance is your cup of tea? Experiment! Take a friend and try it for a month!

Web sites: http://www.aarp.org/health/fitness/info-2005/dance_to_health.html

<http://www.wvsquaredance.org/health.html>; <http://www.squaredance.gen.or.us/health.php>

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/weight-control/active-at-any-size/Pages/active-at-any-size.aspx>; <http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/dont-be-square-dance>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2780534/> (relates to Parkinson Disease patients)

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090401103127.htm>

<http://www.ihrp.uic.edu/content/news-salsa-adds-spice-older-adults> univ of Illinois Chicago the Institute for Health Research and Policy