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## Are dance workouts good for keeping fit?

Finding an activity you enjoy is key when it comes to staying active – and dancing is a great way to get fit and have fun at the same time. And with Strictly Come Dancing back on our screens again, there's no better time to join in.

### Is dancing a good workout?

Strictly Come Dancing is back on our screens and providing the nation with dance inspiration, but dance [fitness](#) is nothing new. Aerobic dance workouts became popular in the 1970s and 1980s and since the early 2000s, Zumba has become a pop culture phenomenon.

A dance session isn't just fun, it's good for you too – and it doesn't matter if you have two left feet. "Dance [workouts](#) provide an excellent cardiovascular challenge and can be tailored to your ability and fitness level," says certified personal trainer [Rachel MacPherson](#).

"When it comes to [exercise](#), consistency is critical, and to stay consistent, you need motivation," she says. "If you enjoy your workout, you are much more likely to stick with it for the long term. Dancing is a fun and joyful activity that also provides the benefits you'd expect from cardiovascular work, such as improved heart health, reduced risk of [type 2 diabetes](#)<sup>1</sup>, better [sleep](#), reduced [stress](#), and better [weight control](#)."

Different dance workouts have different benefits. For example, barre – a type of exercise that incorporates [strength](#) and cardio with ballet movements – aims to improve muscular strength, tone and flexibility. Research suggests Zumba classes, a form of Latin-themed aerobic dance, supports both good physical and [mental health](#)<sup>2</sup>.

# Why dance workouts are good for mental health

It's no secret that [exercise](#) is good for our psychological well-being. Being active triggers the release of feel good endorphins which help to alleviate [stress](#) and boost our mood. However, studies suggest dancing supports our brain health and mood in a number of specific ways.

Research indicates dance can increase the number of cells in the brain's hippocampus, the region of the brain responsible for long and short-term [memory](#)<sup>3</sup>.

Dancing also engages several brain areas and promotes neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to change and adapt<sup>4</sup>. Even a single dance session has been shown to decrease [tension](#) and depression, while boosting [energy](#)<sup>5</sup>.

Dance interventions have been found to be effective in improving the quality of life in people with [Parkinson's disease](#)<sup>6</sup> and [Alzheimer's disease](#)<sup>7</sup>.

## Is there a risk of injury with dance workouts?

As with any [exercise](#) class, there is always a risk of injury. "The injury risk with dance workouts is trying to do too much too soon," says MacPherson.

"Ensure you stick to basic moves and don't twist or jar your joints. You may need to rest a day in between particularly vigorous dance workouts," she says. "But overall, dancing is a low-risk activity that you can adjust to suit your ability and needs."

## Are dance workouts suitable for everyone?

There are many different dance workouts to suit all abilities. Often, [fitness](#) classes such as Zumba or Barre have separate classes for beginners. Zumba Gold is a lower-intensity version of the typical Zumba class, which may be suitable for older participants.

"If you are in a wheelchair or have [limited mobility](#), you can move your body in a way that feels good for you," says MacPherson.

You can also build up your dance fitness routines as you gain [strength](#) and confidence. "For those who need more challenge, you can incorporate body weight or weighted resistance moves into your dancing workout with [squats](#), lunges, jumps, and more," MacPherson says.

"You could even consider holding light weights to work your arms and shoulders. Just be very careful with your movements and don't swing or twist yourself out of proper form."

## How to find a dance class near you

Most gyms and community centres host dance-based fitness classes. Some schools and universities offer pay-as-you-go [exercise](#) classes for the general public too, which don't require a gym membership.

You can also start dancing from the comfort of your own home by searching for fitness classes on YouTube.

## Further reading

1. [Colberg et al: Exercise and Type 2 Diabetes](#)
2. [Barranco-Ruiz et al: Dance fitness classes improve the health-related quality of life in sedentary women](#)
3. [Rehfeld et al: Dancing or Fitness Sport? The Effects of Two Training Programs on Hippocampal Plasticity and Balance Abilities in Healthy Seniors](#)
4. [Texiera-Machado et al: Dance for neuroplasticity: A descriptive systematic review](#)
5. [Rokka et al: The Role of the Intensity of Exercise on Mood in Dance Aerobic](#)
6. [Lewis et al: Mood changes following social dance sessions in people with Parkinson's disease](#)
7. [Ruiz-Muelle et al: Dance for People with Alzheimer's Disease: A Systematic Review](#)

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Authored by: Lydia Smith	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Krishna Vakharia, MRCGP	
Originally Published: 20/11/2023	Next review date: 20/09/2023	Document ID: doc_32097

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