

Dancing: It's Good For Your Health

By Joyce Luhrs

Joyce Luhrs is president of Luhrs & Associates, a marketing, public relations, and grant proposal/research services firm. The company offers a full line of promotional/advertising specialty items ranging from garments to sports bags and awards to coffee mugs imprinted or embellished with a dance organization's logo, motif, or other custom art work.



Ms. Luhrs' by-lined articles have appeared in Enterprising Women, Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education, Business in Bergen, The Bottom Line, New Jersey Jewish News, Dancing USA, Hispanoticias, Garden State Woman, Partners In Giving, and Rumbo Latino. She may be reached at 201-592-9126 or jluhrs@erols.com.

Does the idea of getting on the treadmill or stair master quickly make you think of one more thing to do in the office? Instead of procrastinating, dance your way to health. Dancing is not only fun and a great way to socialize, mix and mingle, but it's also a good way to stay physically fit.

The health benefits of social and ballroom dancing have long been proclaimed by doctors. Medical doctors have recommended dance as a good exercise to some very notable patients including United States presidents. "Ballroom or social dancing is a mild form of exercise for the hear involving the entire body. Dr. Paul Dudley White, President Eisenhower's doctor, was among the first doctors to recommend ballroom dancing as a valuable form of exercise. He recommended it to President Eisenhower," explained Stan Martin of Englewood, New Jersey, who with his dance partner and wife, Judie, has taught privately ballroom and social dancing to students in the Garden State, New York and Connecticut.

Promoting Mental & Physical Fitness

Several leading research centers have touted the physical fitness benefits of social dancing. The renown Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota reported that dancing is not only a great way to have fun and socialize but also offers several health benefits. Dance 30 minutes continuously, and you will burn 200 to 400 calories, the same as walking, swimming, or cycling.

Their research found social dancing provides cardiovascular conditioning and strong bones. Consistent social dance exercise leads to a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels. They recommend 30 to 40 minutes of continuous activity three to four times a week. The degree of cardiovascular conditioning depends on how vigorously you dance, how long you dance continuously and how regularly.

The side-to-side motions of many ballroom dances such as mambo and swing strengthen the tibia, fibula, and femur and also help in the prevention or slow loss of bone mass associated with osteoporosis.

Dr. Amy Cousins, co-owner of a Fred Astaire Dance Studio in Englewood, New Jersey and a gynecologist in private practice in Binghamton, New York, concurred and described the numerous health benefits associated with social dancing. "Dancers I know have much better posture. They know how to balance their weight and move and have less accidents in the first place because they're supple and their joints are moving. Social dancing makes it easier to climb stairs and avoids developing a dowager's hump, often seen in older women," she explained.

Dr. Cousins pointed out that younger people working hunched over a desk on a daily basis banging on a computer can greatly benefit from social dancing, while minimizing the risks often associated with contact sports and other forms of exercise. "This may be the only way to avoid having a slipped disk later on. It keeps their bodies mobile and their joints moving. This has all of the advantages and none of the disadvantages. In research studies, they tested people doing a quickstep; it's the same caloric level as running a four minute mile...social dancing is an all around good exercise," she said.

Therapeutic & Relaxing

Social dancing may be prescribed after a surgery as part of a physical therapy regimen. A study conducted at the California State University at Long Beach a few years ago showed beginning students can derive health benefits from ballroom dancing that equal aerobic dancing or jogging. Forty-five subjects (ages 18 to 35) warmed up five minutes followed by a 20-minute aerobic exercise with a cha-cha, a polka, two swing dances of jitterbug and lindy, a Viennese waltz, and a samba. Most of the people got their heart rates up to recommended training rates, particularly with the polka, swing, and the waltz. Results showed some forms of ballroom dancing burn between 250 and 300 calories per hour and even more with fast, vigorous dancing up to 400 calories an hour burns up.

Forget your cares and travails and dance the night away. "We have one student, a nursing supervisor, who refers to her evening of social dancing as her mental health night. Others find the dancing to be relaxing and a relief from everyday business pressures and stresses. Psychiatrists, many who come for their own pleasure, also recommend it for their patients. The movement to music is always a superior form of relaxation," noted Judie.