

# Ballroom Dance – It's Good For You!

by J.M. Nelson

We dance for pleasure, the joy of combining music we like with physical activity. The health benefits of dance are emotional as well as physiological. Socializing with others who share ones interest in dance provides a positive sense of well being. Dance activity level can range from the leisurely pace of golf to a workout comparable to that of a long distance runner. The health benefits of dance are certainly worth considering, but dancers dance for the joy of dancing.

Health care professionals tell us that people who laugh and smile a lot are healthier and live longer. Dancers laugh and smile a lot; even if Tango dancers are not smiling on the outside, they are probably smiling on the inside. Ballroom dance requires mental alertness - awareness of the music, the movement, the environment, nearby dancers, and, of course, our partner. These are all consistent with activities that help preserve mental and neurological health.

**Dancing burns calories**, and the calories burned are proportional to the amount of work done. When we walk, run, or dance, we move our weight up and down as we progress; we move a weight over a distance, the physicist's definition of work. Of particular value to the dancer is that the cumulative calories expended are just as important as the duration and intensity of exercise, particularly as we grow older. Too often people think they must exercise for at least 30 minutes and at 70 percent capacity (maximum heart rate) or more, but all exercise (calorie burning) is important. Thus dancing, even at intermittent intervals, burns calories.

**Cardiopulmonary Benefits of Dance.** The caloric consequences of dancing are relatively constant. Benefits to heart and lungs will vary depending on the general condition of the dancer and the intensity and duration of their dancing.

**Caloric Implications for the Social Dancer.** The following chart shows the approximate calories burned in an hour of continuous dancing. It also shows the approximate equivalent in miles per hour and minutes per mile of walking or jogging.

Data from research on running and walking indicates that each step requires a slightly different amount of calories depending on a person's weight: approximately 0.03 calories per step for 125 pounds, 0.04 calories per step for 150 pounds, 0.05 calories per step for 175 pounds, and 0.06 calories per step for 200 pounds. These data enable us to approximate the number of calories burned per minute according to tempo and dance style. We might add a few calories via other muscular involvement not usually considered in running and walking, but these estimates seem insightful nonetheless.

In general, dancing is comparable to walking; if you can walk, you can dance. Anyone in doubt regarding their ability to perform the physical maneuvers associated with dance should consult with their physician or a licensed exercise physiologist.

## Calories Per Hour of Continuous Dancing

| Style                | Min/Mi | 125 lb. | 150 lb. | 175 lb. | 200 lb. | MPH |
|----------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| Foxtrot ssqq 120 BPM | 25     | 144     | 192     | 240     | 288     | 2.4 |
| Tango 128 BPM        | 25     | 144     | 192     | 240     | 288     | 2.4 |
| Foxtrot sqq 120 BPM  | 22     | 162     | 216     | 270     | 324     | 2.7 |
| Waltz 30 MPM         | 22     | 162     | 216     | 270     | 324     | 2.7 |
| Rumba 136 BPM        | 20     | 184     | 245     | 306     | 367     | 3.1 |
| Merengue 120 BPM     | 17     | 216     | 288     | 360     | 432     | 3.6 |
| Quickstep 200 BPM    | 14     | 255     | 340     | 425     | 510     | 4.2 |
| Mambo 196 BPM        | 14     | 265     | 353     | 441     | 529     | 4.4 |
| ChaCha 120 BPM       | 13     | 270     | 360     | 450     | 540     | 4.5 |
| Samba 204 BPM        | 13     | 275     | 367     | 459     | 551     | 4.6 |
| WC Swing 120 BPM     | 12     | 288     | 384     | 480     | 576     | 4.8 |
| Viennese 54 MPM      | 12     | 292     | 389     | 486     | 583     | 4.9 |
| Polka 240 BPM        | 11     | 324     | 432     | 540     | 648     | 5.4 |
| EC Swing 140 BPM     | 11     | 336     | 448     | 560     | 672     | 5.6 |

