

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

