

Want to get moving but also have fun with friends?

# Just DANCE

By Monica Shah

**H**ow would you like to burn up to 600 calories per hour while listening to groovy music? You can—all you have to do is dance! “Dance is an amazing way to get a workout,” says Liza W., 14, of Los Angeles.

## Dance Does a Body Good

A dance floor is just as good a place for exercise as a basketball court or a jogging track. Dancing can be excellent cardiovascular exercise—that means it’s great for your heart. Experts at the Mayo Clinic and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute agree that dance can increase energy, improve coordination and flexibility, strengthen and tone muscles, combat obesity, and even manage stress. Liza, who has type 1 diabetes, has found that dance also helps control her blood sugar.

Celeste M., 13, prefers dance to aerobics or sports. “You never really realize that you’re exercising because you’re having too much fun,” says the Elk Mound, Wis., teen.

There’s more to dance than just moving your body, though. Dancing can help keep you mentally fit because the movements involve active thinking. That’s according to researchers at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Yeshiva University in New York City.

JEFF GREENBERG/AGE FOTOSTOCK

This event in Miami brought dance to the streets to help people get healthy.

Young people who dance agree. “It builds your mind,” says Celeste. She’s been dancing for seven years. “Your memory starts to improve when you dance because you have to memorize the sequences of steps.”

And there’s more, notes dance fan Yash J., 14, of South Brunswick, N.J. “Moving along to the beat is a great way to let go of stress,” he says.

## Take Your Pick

There are many different dances to choose from. To learn about your options, check out a dance workout DVD from the library or take low-cost classes at a Y or a community center. Try some of these styles on for size:

**Ballet:** Try this if you like the limber grace of the movies *Save the Last Dance*, *Billy Elliot*, or *The Company*. This type of dance involves precise steps, or choreography. “Ballet is a very pretty kind of dance,” says Celeste. “You have to have fluid and light movements.” Ballet tones and sculpts the body while improving flexibility, strength, and posture.

**Ballroom dance:** Try this if you like the social dancing of *Mad Hot Ballroom* or *Dancing With the Stars*. Styles include couples dances such as the waltz, the tango, and the fox-trot. “I love ballroom dancing because while I’m performing, I don’t care

who’s watching,” explains Alexis A., 15, of Titusville, Fla. She has been ballroom dancing competitively for four years. Competitive ballroom dance, also called DanceSport, may be included in the 2016 Olympics.



PER-ANDERS PETERSSON/GETTY IMAGES

**African dance:** Try this if you like Beyoncé’s rhythmic hip shaking and angular movements in her music videos (such as *Déjà Vu*). This style reflects actions in everyday traditional African life or the leaping and soaring of animals. Moves tend to involve stomping,







# Dance Your Way to Fun and Friendship

"I like to dance because it's a fun way to meet people," says Yash J., 14. The New Jersey teen is not alone.

Dance is a healthful option, especially for people who aren't otherwise athletic, because you're more likely to stick to something if it's fun. And it's hard not to have fun when you're bopping to the beat. "Dancing puts you in a happy mood," says dance professor Kukuwa Nuamah.

Shaking it on the dance floor may also help your ability to relate to others. "Dance is very social for many people," points out Kim Holmes, who has taught dance at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York City. Social interaction can help fight stress and loneliness. A belly dancing or hip-hop class can be an entertaining way to meet new friends.

KEVIN COOLEY/GETTY IMAGES

clapping, and drumming. "African dancing works your large muscles and also targets your small muscles, which helps burn fat," says Kukuwa Nuamah, professor of African cultural dance at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va. Nuamah has been teaching African, Caribbean, and Latin dance for 25 years.

**Zumba:** Try this if you like Latin dances such as the merengue or salsa. Drawing on a wide variety of Latin dance forms, Zumba workouts combine aerobics, body sculpting, and dance. The results are better cardiovascular fitness and toned muscles.

**Masala Bhangra Workout:** Try this if you like the Bollywood energy of *Shumdog Millionaire* or *The Cheetah Girls: One World*. Created by fitness instructor Sarina Jain of New York City, this workout is based on a traditional Indian folk dance. Dancers whirl, shrug their shoulders, and clap to the fast, lively beat of the *dhol* (drum). The cardiovascular and strength-training moves of Bhangra (and other Bollywood dance workouts) can help build endurance and stamina. "Besides being a fun way to exercise," Jain adds, "you can also learn a little about Indian culture."

## Ready? Set? Dance!

One of the best things about dance is that you don't have to take a formal class. "Anyone can dance," says Kim Holmes, a jazz and hip-hop instructor in New York City. "Just tapping your foot or moving your head from side to side is a way of dancing."

To get the most fitness out of any dance session, treat it as you would any other workout. "Start by warming up and stretching," Jain says. Aim to boogie for an hour. That's the daily amount of exercise time recommended for teens. And cool down afterward by switching to a slower rhythm, stretching, or doing yoga.

Dance is a cheap, easy, and fun way to work your workout. It can be as simple as cranking up your favorite music and moving to the beat—in your room, in a park, or at a school dance. So, what are you waiting for? Get moving! **CHI**



## THINK ABOUT IT

Although you may not consider dance when you think about exercise, it's definitely a good way to get a heart-healthy workout. What are some other types of exercise in disguise?