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## Assessment of Dance and its Health Benefits

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BY

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### ABSTRACT

*Dance over the history has been a very important factor for healthy life. In the ancient millennium of Greek and the Egyptian, dance was seen as a form of artistic expression, religious rituals and educational method. But as time went by, dance evolved from the ancient ways to the middle ages which gave birth to the classical dance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the modern dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dance is an art form or sports activity that is typically used in performance, liturgical or expressionist venues. There are many styles of dance, each with its own attractions such as: ballet, jazz, hip-hop and ballroom etc. However, as a general exercise, dancing brings many known benefit such as better performing cardiovascular system, weight control, metabolism and psychological benefit that can also be produced with many others forms of exercise. The review further recommended that, dance participation appears to contribute positively to individuals' wellbeing and health across cultures and age groups. In such manner it should be implemented both in educational function and workshops.*

**KEYWORDS: Dance and Health Benefits**

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### Introduction

Dance is a healthy physical activity, with many far reaching physical, and psychological benefits. Dancing can be enjoyed in many forms, and is for every age and ability (Wikipedia, 2015). Dance involves the body, emotion, and mind, all three of these culturally mediated, not only biologically based. In the perceptions and use of body, emotion, and mind are influenced by culture (Hanna, 2000). Types of dance can entail body movements, expression and collaboration (Ravelin, Kylvä and Korhonen, 2006). Dance for health has become an important factor in the prevention, treatment and management in several health circumstances. It can benefit both physical and psychological health and subsidizes social communication (Ward, 2008). Dance conditions an individual to moderate, eliminate, or avoid tension, chronic fatigue, and other disabling conditions that result from the effects of stress. Dancing may help in healing process as a person gains a sense of control through (a) possession by the spiritual in dance, (b) mastery of movement, (c) escape or diversion from stress and pain through a change in emotion, states of consciousness, and/or physical capability, and (d) confronting stressors to work through

ways of handling their effects (Hanna, 2000). The correlation between dance and health has been subject of a number of research studies that show dance to be a largely healthy exercise. However, there are a number of health risks that require attention (Ward, 2008).

### **Dance Origins**

During the ancient civilizations, such as the Greek and the Egyptian, had a significant development of dance as a form of artistic expression, religious rituals and educational method (Meyer-Dietrich, 2009). As far as the ancient Greeks are concerned, Lawler cited in Elpidoforou (2016) wrote that for them dance was a truly social activity. They tended to express all their feelings by dancing and dance itself was marking all the great social events. The end of the ancient period has found Europe in the midst of changes at all levels. The art was impregnated by social movements and uprisings, and the "Dark Ages" of the Middle Ages preceded the periods of Renaissance and Enlightenment during which dance had a development similar to the process in each society (Elpidoforou, 2016). During middle Ages, they were only two forms of dance expression: the laity dances ("dances des sociétés populaires") and the courtier dances ("dances de cour"). The period of Renaissance transformed along with philosophy, art, and religion, as well as dance in Italy and then in France setting the stage for the birth of classical dance (Craine and Mackrell, 2004). Classical dance could be defined as a form of Western academic dance using a dance technique known as "danse d' école (the classical school). A key role in the construction of Ballet played by Louis XIV and this type of Western academic dance has developed in Russia in a more virtuosic style during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Craine and Mackrell, 2004). In the era of Modern Dance, it has been used to describe the type of dance which has been historically placed in the early period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it is not based on the academic school of classical ballet (Elpidoforou, 2016). On the contrary, the first pioneers of modern dance, such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Denis, Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, have created dance pieces rejecting the structural formality and sometimes the thematic frivolity of classical ballet. Until the 60s, (modern) dance has been inspired by Zen, Indian philosophy, the Theosophists and artists of the East (Au and Au, 2002).

### **Types of Dance**

Dance is an art form or sports activity that is typically used in performance, liturgical or expressionist venues. From the French word, "danser," dance involves the movement of your body (typically to the beat of music) in various fashions according to the style being used. There are many styles of dance to choose from, each with its own attractions, but those featured in ballet, jazz, hip-hop and ballroom etc. are the most frequently used which include the following:

**Ballet:** Ballet has been the dominant genre in Western theatre dance since its development in Italy during the Renaissance by the Medici family as an independent form in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and its characteristic style of movement is still based on the positions and steps developed in the court dances of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mackrell, 2009). This is a very graceful and technical form of dance perfect for all ages, created in Italy during the

Renaissance by the Medici family. It is mostly performed in classical music, this dance style focuses on strength, technique and flexibility. The most basic feature of the ballet style is the turned-out position of the legs and feet, in which the legs are rotated in the hip socket to an angle of 90 degrees and the feet point outward (Setia, 2008). This position gives the body an open, symmetrical appearance, and it also facilitates the high leg extensions and fast turns typical of ballet. Openness is most characteristic of the ballet dancer's stance, for the head is nearly always lifted and the arms held out in extended curves.

**Hip-hop:** In the early days, hip-hop was generally seen in breakdancing and from there on, one could witness many innovations of this dance style. It is strenuous and mostly improvisational; a lot of people simply make up steps, that go with the heavy beats of the music. Hip-hop dancing covers a large spectrum; breaking, locking, popping, freestyling and krumping can be categorized under this dance form, mostly performed in hip-hop music (Lindberg, 2019).

**Ballroom dancing:** Ballroom dancing is one of the most entertaining and elite styles of dancing, originated in Germany, but is now a popular act followed in varied dance styles. In the earlier days, ballroom dance was only for the privileged class of people in the socialites. This dance involves a number of partner-dancing styles such as the Waltz, Swing, Foxtrot, Rumba, Quickstep, Tango, Viennese waltz, Samba, Cha-Cha-Cha, Paso Doble, Mambo and Jive (Dance Facts, 2012). Today, the popularity of ballroom dance is evident, given the innumerable shows and competitions worldwide that revere dance, in all its form.

**Belly dancing:** Belly dance is one of the most famous oriental folk dances in the world originated in the Middle East, and it emphasizes the complex movement of the torso and entire body utilizing sudden percussive movements, unstoping fluid body motions and presence of small and fast shimmies, shivers and vibrations of the hips or the ribcage. Belly dance is regarded as very sensual, emotional and captivating.

**Tap dancing:** Among many types of popular dances around the world, tap dance is one of the most unusual dances. Instead of focusing on body movements and dancing with a partner, tap dance focuses on timing and beats which is characterized by the creation of percussion-like musically-focused rhythm performance using tap shoes striking on the floor in accordance with the dancing music.

**Jazz:** Jazz dance finds its origins in the African-American culture. From the olden days till date, there are many influences that have added variety to this dance form. It is a high-energy dance style involving kicks, leaps and turns to the beat of the music. One can see many overlapping steps in jazz dancing, which are common to others. These steps in Jazz dance that mimic other forms are the ball change, the pivot step, the toe rise, the pirouettes, the jazz walk etc. This type of dance can also incorporate various styles.

### **Tips for Dancing Well**

Let go of insecurity and fear

Start with a strong foundation

Have a Goal

Practice outside of classes

Master the rhythm and timing before styling

Position yourself correctly in class

### **Dance and Health Benefits**

From the dawn of history, dance can be understood to provide great benefits to the body's metabolism and health. As millennia's went by, knowledge of human body gave more concrete evidence of the benefits of dance to health (Dance Facts, 2012). However, as a general exercise, dancing brings many known benefit such as better performing cardiovascular system, weight control, metabolism and psychological benefit that can also be produced with many others forms of exercise. Therefore, from better physical and mental health to a boost in emotional and social well-being, moving your body to the sound of music can transform your life (Lindberg, 2019).

**Physical Health and Fitness:** Dancing can be a way to stay fit for people of all ages, shapes and sizes. It has a wide range of physical, and mental benefits including: improved general and psychological wellbeing, greater self-confidence and self-esteem, and better social skills; improved muscle tone and strength (Ravelin, et. al., 2006), weight management, stronger bones; increased aerobic fitness; improved condition of your heart and lungs; improved balance and spatial awareness; increased muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness; improved mental functioning; reduced risk of osteoporosis, better coordination, agility and flexibility, increased physical confidence as well as help reduce cardiovascular disease (Lindberg, 2019), help weight control, stress and bring about other benefits commonly associated with physical fitness.

**Mental Health:** Dance has been repeatedly shown to positively impact a person's mental health. Minton and Faber (2016) described the mind as doing mental gymnastics while learning complex dance movements. The complexity alluded to contributes to the extremely diverse mental health benefits of dance. Duberg, Hagberg, Sunvisson and Möller (2013) found that, despite problems such as stress and other potential challenges in being an adolescent, dance can result in high adherence and a positive experience for the participants. Dancing had the potential to contribute to new healthy habits. An advocate for arts, Jensen, Eric (2001) clearly identifies the effects of dance on mental health. He noted that dance improved cognitive development, creativity, concept of self, improved learning and competencies, vestibular action, ability to follow direction and instruction, timing and memory, and emotional expression and control.

**Emotional Benefits:** Research argues that emotions, thinking, and learning are all connected (Salo, 2019). Emotions drive attention, create meaning, and have memory pathways (Jensen, 2005). This strong, productive combination leads to learning. The classroom and the school provide opportunities for endless emotional experiences, and students' brains will be altered by those experiences. The brain is far more active and

chemically stimulated when emotions are involved. Dopamine and norepinephrine are released during movement and physical activity. These emotional chemicals (hormones and neurotransmitters) enhance long-term learning when administered either before or after learning (Jensen, 2005). Though dance choreography can be deep in meaning, movement does offer instant gratification that elicits positive feelings and emotions. Similarly, Pavitra and Shubrata (2014) states that children are emotionally inept and do not have the mature capacity to express themselves verbally with coherent articulation; their emotions are bottled up, unresolved, tense, and repressed. "Since earliest times...dance and creative movements are known to reach out to the depth of the unconscious aspects of the mind and effectively mobilize the blocked psychic content. The aesthetic distance physically between the dancer(s) and audience enables both parties to release emotions, channel other emotions and transform their remaining the emotions (Pavitra and Shubrata, 2014).

### **Dance and Wellbeing**

The contribution of dance participation to wellbeing involves a variety of social, physical, and personal components. However, most prominent is the overarching quality of life, or sense of life satisfaction group-based dance participation brings. Through a randomized control trial involving 57 women aged 65–80 years in Portugal, Cruz-Ferreira, Marmeleira, Formigo, Gomes, and Fernandes (2015) observed an increase in life satisfaction and physical fitness in the intervention group when compared to their control group after 24 weeks. They concluded that the integration of mobility, physical, cognitive, and social skills attributed to the dance classes was the root cause for this improvement in quality of life. Similarly, Nadasen (2008) found out that older women participating in regular dance classes reported a significant increase in their engagement in social activities and a widening of their social networks. For most of these women (aged 60–82 years), having joined the dance class merely as a way of boosting their weekly physical activity, the boost to their social activities (and their quality of life) was unexpected but welcome. Additionally, Muro and Artero (2017) studied 87 young women (mostly university students; average age 20.88 years) who participated in at least 3 hours of non-competitive dance practice every week. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to determine if wellbeing and life satisfaction could be correlated with dance participation. Muro and Artero found that those who regularly participated in dance practice were more mindful and experienced a better quality of life than those who did not dance (or practice any other kind of sport). Consistently, Duberg, Moller, and Sunvisson (2016) found similar results in a randomized control trial of 112 teenage (13–18 years) girls. The girls in the intervention group reported dance classes as a safe, enjoyable space where they could express themselves emotionally. Improved self-image and self-trust were paramount to the perceived quality of life and wellbeing of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

Dance is a physical activity, with many far reaching physical, and psychological benefits. The benefits of dance encompass all areas of health, including physical, mental, and

emotional. Not only does it give you a way to express yourself and have fun, but it also counts toward your cardiovascular exercise. Dance has become a very important factor for healthy living in the prevention, treatment and management in several health circumstances. Dance conditions an individual to moderate, eliminate, or avoid tension, chronic fatigue, and other disabling conditions that result from the effects of stress. Several types of dance include: Ballet, Hip-hop, Ballroom dancing, Belly dancing, Tap dancing and Jazz dance etc. has been viewed in this paper.

## Recommendations

1. Dance participation appears to contribute positively to individuals' wellbeing and health across cultures and age groups. In such manner it should be implemented both in educational function and workshops.
2. Further researches should be conducted empirically, to see the effects of dance, in both adolescent and adult on the physical activity levels, reducing or preventing weight gain, reducing anxiety, improving mood and eating disorders as well as the health impact of creativity in dance.

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