

Whether you try ballet, Tango, or just freestyle with your friends, dancing of any sort confers some incredible health benefits



Dancing gets a 10 from Len

While not everyone may be as incredible as Michael Flatley, everybody and anybody can benefit from giving dance a try. Whether you try ballet, tango, or just freestyle with your friends, dancing of any sort confers some incredible health benefits.

Improve learning and memory. Dancing and learning dances activates the cognitive centre of the brain and encourages neural plasticity. This means that neurons are healthier and more adaptable throughout life, meaning better cognitive function as you age. Especially in later years, skills and neurons enhanced through dance are incredibly important in maintaining memory function. It is also one of the few forms of physical activity that effectively protects against dementia.

Improve mood. Like any form of exercise, dance promotes the release of hormones in the body, like endorphins, which makes you feel good. But be warned, dancing can be addictive, in the best possible way. Dancing also improves posture, which is good for those of us who sit slumped too long. As well as appearing more attractive and confident, better posture has actually been scientifically linked with a more positive mood and outlook.

Reduce stress. As with any form of exercise, dancing reduces the amount of stress hormones in your body. Not only is it a great form of physical activity, but it is a good way to convey creativity and emotional expression. For these reasons, it is also known to reduce depression. Let yourself go with the music and dance your cares away.

Keep fit. Why worry about a workout when you could be dancing? Exercise is important, especially as you age, so why not challenge your mind and body by taking a dance class? Dance works to improve blood and lymph flow, improve muscle tone, improve flexibility, and reduce bodily stiffness. It'll keep you enjoying life and ageing gracefully for years to come!

Companionship. If you attend a dance class or group you will be bound to meet other people. If you do not have a partner to take with you, you will be sure to find someone to take to the floor with or be alongside in a line dance.

And, although it should be implied, let's not forget the most overlooked and most important reason for dancing – it's fun! When it comes down to it, the most important things in life are fitting in more fun and not taking yourself too seriously. Give dance a try: be it flamenco, ballroom, hip hop, ballet,

tap, jazz, contemporary, bedroom freestyle, or zumba. With an open mind, you'll be rocking it on the dance floor in no time!

According to a recent survey by the Royal Academy of Dance the older you get the less embarrassed you are to dance.

Melanie Murphy, RAD's Director of Marketing Communications & Membership, said: "The results of this survey reinforce how dance can help to build self-confidence at any age. Our research team within the Faculty of Education have undertaken extensive research into the health and wellbeing benefits of dance under its *Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing* project, with one key audience being the 60 plus market. In response to the research last year, we launched a programme of Silver Swans™ classes to meet the demand from that market, and we have since seen an increasing demand for more classes across the country."

We have also had our attention drawn to Green Candle Dance Company. They are one of the UK's leading dance troupes with over 25 years' experience delivering dance to the community and is known for the high quality and originality of its work involving both young and older people with and without disabilities.

They have recently hosted *Sagacity!*, a festival of dance for and by older people for the fourth year running, where the region's most vibrant older people's dance companies took to the stage to perform in the beautiful theatre at Oxford House.

As well as *Sagacity!* Green Candle delivers many other projects including *Remember to Dance* for people with dementia and their carers, *Older Men Moving* a movement and exercise class for older men, *Your Move – Falls Prevention* a pilot project for the CCG, along with tailored projects within residential care homes, hospitals, day centres and schools.

The company also provides a Diploma course in Leading Dance for Older People and one day workshops. For further information about current projects please refer to their website www.greencandle.com

Len Goodman, the doyen of ballroom dance, who is Head Judge of the *Strictly Come Dancing* panel, also believes dance is the perfect way to combine exercise with enjoyment.

'If you're married it's something you can share with your other half, and if you're single it gives you an opportunity to meet other people,' he says.

'We're all living longer, so we have all got to be more active in the third age.'

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