

# Hate Exercising? Try Belly Dancing

By Holly McGurgan

Finding an enjoyable, heart-healthy workout was harder than Janice Mininberg expected. Gym workouts and morning runs bored the Newtown, PA, resident. Boot camp classes were just too strenuous.

“At 60, I needed something that was fun and not too hard on the joints,” Mininberg says. “I didn’t want to be in pain for a week after an exercise class or have to force myself to go to the gym.”

Belly dancing offered the perfect exercise solution. The ancient dance form provides a full workout and helps firm muscles, according to Anne Jeronis, 46, a belly dancing instructor from Langhorne, PA.

“Belly dancing involves much more than simply shaking your midsection,” Jeronis says. “Dancers carefully isolate and control individual muscle groups when they shimmy across the floor or perform diaphragm lifts, and shoulder, hip and knee drops.”

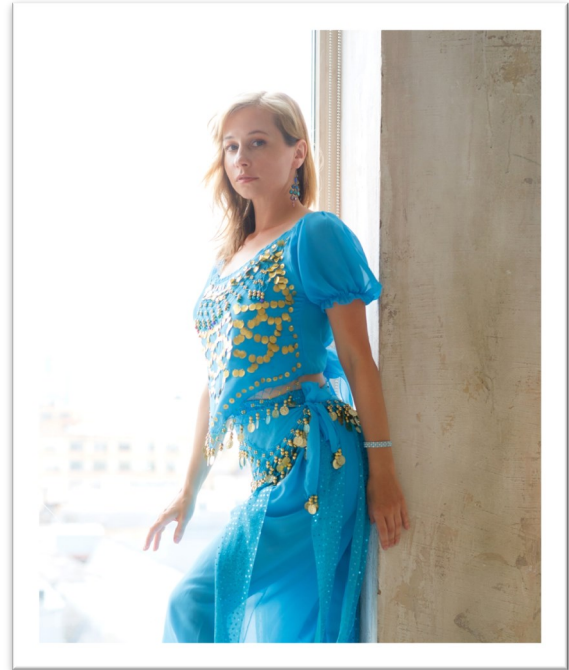
The low-impact dance moves strengthen abdominal and core muscles, tone arms, and increase flexibility and range of motion. Hip drops are particularly effective in strengthening oblique muscles in the abdomen and working the calf and quadriceps muscles in the legs. Shoulder shimmies strengthen the deltoid muscles in the shoulders and firm arm muscles.

In addition to toning muscles, belly dancing increases your heart rate, works the large muscles of the body, and provides a heart-healthy aerobic workout. Health experts, like the doctors at the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise per week. Following aerobic exercise guidelines could decrease your risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and some forms of cancer.

Belly dancing also offers a few unexpected health benefits. Middle-aged women who experienced incontinence saw an improvement in their symptoms after enrolling in belly dancing classes in one research study. In another, women diagnosed with cancer felt more energetic, less depressed, and had a better quality of life, thanks to their belly dancing routines.

Old movies depict belly dancing as an activity for svelte harem girls, but belly dancing is appropriate for all age ranges, genders, shapes and sizes, according to Jeronis. Dancers in her classes range in age from high school students to people in their sixties.

“You don’t have to be young or thin to belly dance,” she says. “Some of the most beautiful belly dancers are shapely women with curves.”



Women aren’t the only ones reaping the benefits of belly dancing. An increasing number of men are enrolling in classes.

Mark Davis, 35, of Cherry Hill, NJ, discovered belly dancing when his girlfriend asked him to join a class with her.

“I was reluctant at first,” he recalls. “I was worried about being the only guy in the class, and I wasn’t sure I’d be able to do the moves.”

His concerns vanished after just a few classes.

“It was harder than I thought,” he says. “But it’s a great workout for the abs and arms.”

Most people, no matter what their dancing ability or fitness level, can master basic belly dance moves, although it may take a few months before proper form is achieved. Jeronis advises new dancers not to become frustrated if they can’t immediately perform belly dance moves perfectly.

“I tell my beginner dancers to be patient with their bodies and enjoy the camaraderie of dancing together in class. It will all come together in time.”