

Put on your dancing shoes and tango your way to better mobility

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Who hasn't felt that sudden urge to hit the dance floor when a favorite song comes on? Whether you have the moves of a Dancing with the Stars champion or two left feet, moving (more or less) to the rhythm of music on a regular basis is not just good for the soul, but also provides health benefits equal to jogging or walking for exercise.

Footloose and fancy-free

In their review of nine studies, the team at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute found that the participants who danced on a regular basis felt emotionally better balanced, less stressed, and more social. In addition to these important factors of good mental health, they found that dancing also improved their physical well-being. The study tested patients chronically suffering from Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, and Fibromyalgia symptoms as well as those recovering from a stroke, spinal cord, and head injuries.

Dancing regularly resulted in measurable improvements in participants' gait patterns – their ability to walk with regular and stable steps – as well as their balance and reaction times. Since up to 45% of physical therapy time is spent addressing rehabilitation of a stable walking pattern, dance can really improve the quality of life for people suffering from a variety of neurological conditions.

Watch this inspiring video about a dance and movement program for stroke patients

Can I have this dance?

The researchers from Canada followed the FITT principle (frequency, intensity, time/duration, type) to evaluate how well each type of dance was suited as a therapy for a particular condition. The researchers found that patients who had suffered a stroke were best served by dancing jazz, merengue, tango, and ballet. The groups studied consisted of an average of only nine participants in each study. Their ages ranged between 43 and 73. And they danced twice a week for 45 to 120 minutes. Clearly, there is plenty of room for you on the dance floor, so why not try it out?

I can't dance...

The studies also covered negative effects or reasons for dropping out of the study. However, most participants stuck with it and did not report any injuries. Perhaps the few who did leave didn't like their dance partner or the music. But more likely it was that the studies lasted anywhere from four to twenty weeks. Participants who left simply had vacation plans, their rehabilitation ended, or they had other scheduling conflicts.

You can dance if you want to...

While studies investigating dance as a therapy often concentrate on Parkinson's patients, the results can apply to others recovering from neurological conditions – including those suffering from the effects of a stroke. With such promising indications, further studies are likely. But for now, all the available evidence points to noticeable improvements in coordination, mobility, and balance through dance. So go, put your records on!

EDITORIAL NOTE: