

## Shall We Dance?

The popularity of the television show *Dancing with the Stars* has once again focused attention on this activity with the 50+ population. Season 11 of this show kicked off this past September and the senior population was represented by the grace of the 76 year old Florence Henderson. Previous seasons of this show have seen 80 year old Buzz Aldrin, 82 year old Cloris Leachman and 66 year old George Hamilton on the ball room dance floor. Although no “senior” has yet won the contest, each has been a role model winner as they have emulated many of the advantages dance has for all of us at least 50+ in age.

Dance benefits are numerous and it is a wonderful way to exercise because it is an enjoyable activity that challenges both the mind and the body. Mayo Clinic professionals report that dancing helps to reduce stress, increase energy, improve strength and increase muscle tone and coordination. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute says that dancing can lower your risk of coronary heart disease, decrease blood pressure, help you manage your weight and strengthen the bones of your legs and hips. The following chart developed by Audrey Dascomb of the National Registry of Dance Educators highlights common benefits cited by several organizations:

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Intellectual</b>	<b>Artistic</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Individual</b>
Fitness	Intellectual Stimulation	Arts Appreciation	Cooperation	Confidence
Coordination	Calculation & Planning	Rhythmic Expression	Communication	Challenging
Cardiovascular Conditioning	Sequential Learning	Creative Expression	Camaraderie	Self-Discipline
Flexibility	Patterns	Imagination	Listening skills	Sense of Accomplishment
Strength	Spatial Development	Innovation	Meet new people	Persistence
Endurance	Increased motivation to learn	Musicality	Social Skills development	Accuracy
Stamina	Problem Solving, Mental flexibility	Tell a story	Fun	Open to new ideas
Improve reflexes	Right & Left Brain inclusion	Represents Cultures	Express Love & Affection	Enhances Self-Esteem

Although the above chart applies to people of all ages there are some specific benefits that are particularly important for seniors because of the aging process. Both men and women begin to lose bone mass as they age and this leads to more broken bones as a result of falling. Our body’s muscles also begin to deteriorate with age and they can lead to a higher body fat ratio and decreased muscle

flexibility. Through dance, seniors will work their muscles, reduce muscle aches, increase flexibility, and improve balance as well as increase bone mass. Overall it is a very positive way to improve our general physical fitness. Dance can also be a very meaningful aspect of social interaction thereby decreasing the feelings of isolation, loneliness, boredom and enhancing the general enjoyment of life.

There are many ways to describe dancing and it is agreed that it is essentially an art form but there is not a singular definition for dance. Moving our bodies usually rhythmically and to music are the most common elements expressed but dance can also be a form of nonverbal communication between humans or other animals as scientists have studied mating dances, and other movements which seem to be in response to sounds in nature.

What constitutes dance depends on artistic, cultural and moral parameters and can range from the very basic functional movements in folk dances to the very specific technical aspects of ballet. People who design dance routines are known as choreographers and many dances often tell a story or illustrate the music.

People of all ages and probably in every culture dance. Sports such as figure skating, gymnastics, synchronized swimming and some forms of martial arts incorporate dance and many ceremonies, rituals and celebrations include dancing. History indicates that many forms of dance were actually created and performed together with music. Some examples of this shared development include the jig, waltz, tango, disco, salsa and hip-hop dances.

Shall We Dance? Whether you remember the 2004 movie by this title with Richard Gere and Jennifer Lopez or the question the King of Siam asked of Anna in the “King and I” Broadway play or musical film (both from the 1950’s with Yul Brynner) or you have a personal memory from your high school prom, the question deserves a very positive YES as a response. We should dance!

You are invited to an interactive session to learn more about dance. The Delta College *50+...Just Like Gold Program* offers monthly “Bits and Bites” sessions (the format is a bit of information along with a bite to eat) that introduce you to new topics, new options and new information. On Friday, December 17<sup>th</sup> the topic will be all about dance. Whether you are shy or think you have two left feet or one who loves to dance and has always appreciated the dancing of others, join Angela Markle, dance instructor in our Great Lakes Bay Region, as she introduces us to having a good time via dance. Join us as we have fun learning about the benefits of dance!

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