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Shake a leg

Don't worry about having two left feet if you wish to dancercise, says **Shibani Chattopadhyay**



Sunita Mehta, a thirty-something working mother of two, was perturbed. Her expanding waistline was becoming impossible to conceal, even under loose garb. To top it, a busy work schedule combined with the responsibilities of managing a house left her too tired to even consider those power-packed gym sessions.

That's when 'dancercise' came to her rescue. A fun workout that combines different forms of 'dance with exercise' has become the rage in physical fitness. In fact, those into dancercise claim it's so much fun that they hardly realise that they've actually put in a vigorous hour of exercise. And it is this factor that prompted Mehta to make it an integral part of her life.

"The usual treadmill and weight training sessions can be quite monotonous after a point of time. I felt the exercise scenario in India was ready for a change and dancercise with its innovative streak fitted in," claims Dr Neeru Dhingra, CEO, North India, Gold's Gym. Dancercise offers more than just plain aerobics. In aerobics, you learn a step at a time and subsequently have more steps added on. So it becomes more like a rule. In dancercise, there are no such strict steps and yet you achieve the benefits that aerobics offers, namely, building endurance and stamina. On an average, a 50-minute session helps burn 700 calories approximately.

The best part about dancercise is that you needn't worry about two left feet as it takes little time for the natural rhythm of the body to be in sync with the dancercise rhythms. Besides, there is no room for boredom. Frequent experimentation laces the programme with an element of unpredictability. As a result, fast-paced dance forms like salsa, jive and swing are twirling exercise buffs around the world. Those, along with a bit of jazz, a few ballet exercises, some modern dance steps combined with aerobics and calisthenics go into the making of dancercise.

Kiran Sawhney, wellness trainer at Fitnesolution (a health studio) in New Delhi, says, "This fitness programme has interesting variations like jazzercise, *bhangra* aerobics, *dandiya* aerobics, hip hop, transcend dance, stomp, Brazilian carnival, Latin dance, hula workout and belly dance thrown in, in good measure." Another interesting offshoot of dancercise is BollyArobix, a combination of Bollywood dance and exercise routines choreographed to a mix of Bollywood, *bhangra* and hip-hop songs.

Every class comprises two sections. "Right from the warm-up to the high-low impact dancercise routines, to the body sculpting section, the BollyArobix class is a workout treat," asserts Nidhi Mehta, centre manager, Fitness One, Chennai. "It helped me lose so much weight that I am looking forward to taking it up again during my holidays," says Myria Antony, a first-year bachelors student of economics and finance at the University of Bristol, UK.

The benefit of dancercise as a fitness regimen is manifold. Says Sawhney, "Apart from the associated fun and funk, the body becomes more rhythmic and agile." And because of its fun element, dancercise is equally popular with children, teenagers and adults. "It is a complete body workout, provides cardio-vascular benefits and helps exercise all the muscle groups," adds Dhingra.

Dancercise being a group activity, it helps people acquire precious social skills. Says Sanjeev Khatri, an entrepreneur and dancercise enthusiast, "With a frenetic lifestyle, fitting in parties was tough. With dancercise, I can now wear jazzy clothes and my workout becomes a party." He goes on to claim that dancercise has gifted him a new family to socialise with.

For others like Preeti Ubhayaker, managing/creative director, BollyZone, a fun and fitness organisation in San Jose, California, dancercise means spending quality time with their loved ones. She recalls, "I took this up to spend more time with my husband, who had joined this programme earlier, and after that I continued with it. The best part is that it brings people from different walks of life together and at the end of it, they become the best of friends." It also has a feel-good factor. Dancing releases endorphins — the happy hormones — and helps release pent-up tension and lightens the mood considerably.

But not all dance movements can help you lose weight. The best way to lose weight is to do a mix of hip-hop, funk and jazz. They help tone the muscles as well as strengthen the butt, abs and legs, and exercise the upper body. So it's important to do a proper warm-up, stretch the major muscle groups and be extremely careful with plyometric moves. It is also essential to cool down and stretch after the workout. "It's best to do it under the supervision of an instructor who knows which muscle group is being targeted. It is also important to reveal your medical history, if any," cautions Dhingra.

Ubhayaker also underlines another pertinent point. It isn't compulsory to know dancing to join the programme. You get to learn some cool moves in course of the session. "So all you need to do is bring along a towel, enthusiasm and a bottle of water," she says. Moreover, it's quite pocket-friendly, with each session costing between Rs 100 and Rs 500 per class. Ananda Shankar Centre for Performing Arts in Calcutta, Fitesolution in New Delhi, Fitness One in Chennai and Swingers Dance Studio in Bangalore are some of the centres that offer dancercise.

So what are you waiting for? Take to the floor and start a fitness routine that will keep you on your toes forever.

