**Dance, Dance, Dance**

Exercise, to me, is as equally important as oxygen is. I need oxygen to live, and I feel the same about exercise. I have to admit, I like MANY forms of exercise, but there is one in particular that doesn’t make me feel like I am exercising - and that’s dance. I was reminded of this recently at the Latin Dance Festival in Albuquerque, NM. The main event featured an all-female band from Colombia and their opener was a local artist. The music was soulful, fast, and wonderful. To my surprise I danced for 4 hours straight! Yes, I was sweating. Yes, I was breathing hard, but I had a smile on my face the entire time, and if my feet didn’t hurt so badly because I had been in high heels all night, I would have danced another hour!

**Mood and Dance**

Dance can often bring about euphoric feelings because our brain releases mood-boosting neurotransmitters. Two important beliefs of dance therapy are that motion and emotions are closely intertwined and motion affects mood in profound ways. When a person is experiencing sadness or low moods, their movements tend to be very slow or non-existent. If a person is experiencing happiness or is excited, their movements may be fast paced and upbeat. People in dance therapy have reported to their therapists that high energy dance improved their moods.

**Mood and Neurotransmitters**

Another reason dancing may help with mood is because dancing is a form of exercise. Back to the mood-boosting neurotransmitters, several enhance our mood during exercise. Serotonin leaves you with feelings of satisfaction and comfort. Dopamine is linked to the brain’s reward system: it serves as motivation for our brain to get things done and to do that “feel-good” thing again. Norepinephrine and epinephrine help us stay active when we think we can’t as part of our “fight or flight” response. In healthy doses, they are beneficial for us.

Our body’s natural pain killer, endorphins, are also released when physical activity occurs. When physical activity is performed on a regular basis; pain, stress, fatigue or depression are decreased due to the release of endorphins. With the release of endorphins, a person will be less aware of anxiety and worries because the brain has been signaled to calm down. Several of these neurotransmitters are the same chemicals that antidepressants and antianxiety medications attempt to increase when taken. Research on exercise being a helpful tool in battling depression and anxiety is prolific.

**Exercise and Dance**

We know there are many other health benefits of
Exercise and Dance Continued...

exercise. Dancing provides both anaerobic and aerobic movements. With such a wide variety of music, dancing can be fast-paced involving different positions and postures as well as incorporating plyometrics (jumps and hops). This type of movement strengthens and firms the muscles from our head to our toes (this includes the heart!). Because dancing involves so many muscle groups, our metabolism increases substantially - more calories are being used. This is helpful for individuals who want to decrease their weight and increase muscle mass.

Dance Is Exercise For The Brain

Dancing is not only good exercise for your body but it’s also good exercise for your brain. The New England Journal of Medicine reported on a major study showing evidence that dancing can stimulate one’s mind enough to ward off Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. The study was on the effects of recreational activities on mental acuity in aging. Here is the synopsis: “The 21-year study of senior citizens, 75 and older, was led by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, funded by the National Institute on Aging, and published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Their method for objectively measuring mental acuity in aging was to monitor rates of dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease. The study wanted to see if any physical or cognitive recreational activities influenced mental acuity. They discovered that some activities had a significant beneficial effect. Other activities had none. They studied cognitive activities such as reading books, writing for pleasure, doing crossword puzzles, playing cards and playing musical instruments. And they studied physical activities like playing tennis or golf, swimming, bicycling, dancing, walking for exercise and doing housework.”

One of the surprises of the study was that almost none of the physical activities appeared to offer any protection against dementia. There was one exception: frequent dancing was the only physical activity to offer protection against dementia.

Here are the results:

Reading – 35% reduced risk of dementia
Bicycling and swimming – 0%
Doing crossword puzzles at least four days a week – 47%
Playing golf – 0%
Dancing frequently – 76%.
Dancing was the greatest risk reduction of any activity studied, cognitive or physical.

Is All Dance Equal?

Dancing in a social setting has been shown to boost self-esteem, reduce social isolation, promote a continued engagement to life and stimulate cognitive acuity more so than dancing in the privacy of your own home. It’s not to say that dancing at home by yourself or in a class setting isn’t good for you. Listening to your favorite music and moving around your house or with others in a class alleviates stress, improves your mood, gets the blood pumping, and increases your energy. But in a social setting it is different. There is a lead and a follow role. Decisions have to be made in both roles. Dance requires mental activity due to sequencing, memorizing steps, and timing body movement to music. Our brain constantly rewrites its neural pathways, as needed. If it doesn’t need to, then it won’t. Participating in mentally engaging activities, such as social dance, sustains this “need”. We are exercising our brain while interacting with others, listening to good music and having fun. This is reason enough from me to get my dancing shoes on. Let’s bust-a-move!
Dancing in Socorro
Every Thursday evening, the NMT Ballroom Club hosts dance lessons and a social dance after. Lessons begin at 7:00 p.m. and the social dance at 8:00 p.m. For updates, request to be a member on the [NMT Ballroom Dance Club Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/NMTCourtyard). A friend and I attended the social dance recently and had a fantastic experience. Everyone is so welcoming. The club members have a common goal – to have FUN! **NMT students**: this is a great social setting to get you out of your comfort zone, to try something new or different, and to exercise your brain in a completely different way than you are used to doing every day of the week in school.

Baba Ganoush – Roasted Eggplant Dip
(Recipe by Inspired Taste)
This is the season for eggplants. This is one of my favorite recipes for these purple oblong creatures.

**Ingredients**
- 2 medium eggplants
- ¼ cup tahini
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 to 3 garlic cloves (depends on your taste)
- ¼ tsp cumin
- ½ tsp sea salt
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil (optional for drizzling)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place eggplant onto baking sheet and prick in several places using a fork. Roast eggplants 40 to 50 minutes or until very soft. Cool 10 minutes or until easily handled.

While eggplants are roasting, combine tahini, lemon juice, garlic, cumin and salt in a medium bowl or blender. Set aside so the flavors meld.

Split the eggplants, drain excess liquid, scrape out the flesh and add to the tahini mixture. Mash eggplant into the tahini mixture with a fork or use a blender but don’t puree it. Leave some texture. Cool to room temperature.

Use as a dip with pita chips, as a spread on sandwiches or as a “sauce” on homemade pizza.

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**Eating Psychology Coach**
RKC Level 1 Instructor
Precision Nutrition Level 1 Coach
HeartMath Mentor/Coach

**Free Community Zumba Classes**
Peggy Lopez and friends teach Zumba Monday’s and Wednesday’s from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at Parkview Elementary School gym. These classes are open to everyone and anyone free of charge. There is no excuse not to get your dance on! More information can be found on the [Zumba Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/NMTCourtyard).