

Some Things You Should Know About **Dance**

With the mounting evidence about how dance benefits the mind and body, it would seem logical to offer dance early in life, *when the brain is still forming.*¹

Dancing *builds discipline, teaches life skills, promotes self-confidence, and improves focus* at school.^{4, 6, 9}

Dance is **transformative and builds strong bodies and minds.** The way dancers process information is different from other physical activities. The brain is asked to work in a different way when you learn repertory and combinations. Dancing makes for a complete, whole, and healthy person. Dance addresses the body, mind, and soul. The level of integration necessary to be successful is very, very advanced.¹

Dance *demands focus.*^{1, 4, 6, 9}

The dance classroom is a **laboratory.**⁶

Dance involves “higher-order” thinking: Creating dance ~ *evaluating, analyzing, applying, and remembering.*^{5, 6}

Dancing, because it is an *impact activity*, *builds strong bones* in young girls (ages 7-12) and continues to build strength up to age 20. A bone “bank” is then established up to age 30 that helps reduce the risk of osteoporosis later in life. Dancing has an overwhelming positive effects on the skeleton. It optimized bone mass, reduced the risk of osteoporosis, and sets the kids up for a lifetime of good bone health.^{8, 9}

Dance enhances personal well being and fitness.

Dance prepares you to meet and pass obstacles and dancers learn perseverance.⁴

Dance is transformative and builds strong bodies and minds.

Dancers take directions and learn later to give directions.⁴

Scientific studies among youth have shown that dance *improves stress, depression, self esteem, motivation, and concentration* at school. Dance can also improve *creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to cope with stress* for those suffering from a variety of illnesses, and can increase the general quality of life of people of all ages. Regular participation in dance may even help *decrease the risk of developing dementia.*¹

Dance is linked to health and healing throughout history and across cultures. Dance is a form of communication that enables self-expression and encourages social connection.^{1, 6}

Various forms of dance are being used in various settings to promote health and well being, including medical and mental health facilities, schools, and community centers.¹

Teens (as well as others) experience *immediate gratification* in terms of the sense of personal accomplishment when completing each dance class.¹

Dancing increases the brain levels of serotonin and norepinephrine, two neurotransmitters that *smooth out negative emotions*. Norepinephrine also helps increase attention and mental focus. In addition, moving to music while we dance *activates the brain's pleasure circuits*. Dancing can even *induce the production of proteins that increase the growth of new neurons in the brain*. Dancing also helps *lay down new synapses, or connections, between neurons*. Both processes can *increase neuroplasticity*, or the ability of the brain to change and adapt to new environments, behaviors, and even recover from injury.¹

Dancing activates both sides of the brain, a process that promotes brain integration and improves learning. Many regions of the brain are required to *remember, plan, and produce* the coordinated movements that enable us to dance to music and rhythm.^{1, 2}

The take-home message is that dancing gives the brain a workout and boosts brain power. Studies of professional dancers have found that dance develops areas of the brain involved in *motor control, spatial imagery processing, sensory integration, memory, mental focus, and cognition*.¹

Dancing is the only physical activity found to reduce the risk of dementia by as much as 76%.

An interest in dance leads to a high state of motivation that produces the sustained attention necessary to improve performance, and the training of attention that leads to improvement in other domains of cognition.¹

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) enables people to work through psychological experiences that may be too difficult to express verbally. *DMT has been used to improve cognitive, emotional, and social integration for people suffering from a variety of psychiatric disorders, including autism, Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, and depression*. DMT also improves physical symptoms and general well-being for people with neurological and medical illness. People with Parkinson's disease, traumatic brain injury, stroke, and a variety of movement disorders can all benefit from DMT.¹

Engaging in ballroom dancing at least twice a week *decreased the risk of developing dementia by 76%* among a group of people aged 75 years and over. Even observing dancing to live music enhanced their memory.^{1, 2, 3}

Dancing is the **ONLY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** found to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's by as much as 76%.^{2, 3}

Studies have shown links between dance and improved symptoms of *depression, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem in youth*.^{1, 12}

Common Core Standards for teaching language arts and math have finally caught up to what we have been **doing in dance all along** - *thinking, creating, and understanding*.⁵

Improvised dance, like tango and ballroom, can **improve divergent thinking**, which is the type used in creating multiple solutions for a given problem. *Divergent thinking is used in creative thought processes.* Structured dance, like ballet, **improves convergent thinking**, which is the type used in finding a single answer for a problem. *Convergent thinking comes in handy when solving math and science problems.* Lovatt and fellow researchers tested out this theory on a group of people with Parkinson's disease, whose creative thinking often declines during the course of the disease. The researchers found that engaging in improvised dance improved the group's divergent thinking skills.¹

Participating in dancing nurtures students' ability to be *independent*, teaches them *creative processing*, and offers them an outlet for *individual expression*.¹

Dancers become great employees, entrepreneurs, scientists, doctors and, or course, teachers, advocates for the arts, and experts in anatomy!

Dancers make *great employees*⁷ because they are:

- teachable & flexible
- fast learners
- always prepared
- hard workers
- problem solvers
- team players, but independent
- dedicated and disciplined
- energetic
- self-motivated
- project confidence in front of large crowds
- detail-oriented
- can handle critique & corrections
- have a sense of organization, cohesiveness and presentation

Dancers Make Great Employees!

¹Come Dance With Me / DANCE USA

June 18, 2013, *Body and Brain Connections*

²Use It or Lose It: Dancing Makes You Smarter by

Richard Powers

³Albert Einstein College of Medicine Research Study

/ *dementia & Alzheimer's*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 19, 2003

⁴Top 10 Skills Children Learn from the Arts

by Lisa Phillips, November 26, 2012, author *The Artistic Edge*

⁵Dance and the Common Core Standards in

Language and Math by Lynn Monson, AzDEO, *Arizona Dance e-Star*, September 2013

⁶Why Dance Matters: Survival of the Fittest &

Learning How to Learn: The Importance of Dance

Education, Heather Vaughan-Southard

<http://www.danceadvantage.net/2012/07/12/why-dance-matters-survival-of-the-fittest/>

⁷6 Reasons Why Ballet Dancers Make Awesome

Employees, <http://sarahjukes.com/2013/01/31>

⁸Early Lifestyle Choices Can Reduce Osteoporosis

Risks Later, www.foodinsight.org/july/aug1997

⁹Tap Dancing-Step to Better Health, by K Parafinczuk, *April 2009, 2013*