BOOGIE ON DOWN

Whether you’re bopping the night away at a party or to the Strictly finals at home, dance your way to healthy joints with our fun moves.

The combination of music and movement is the perfect recipe for feeling great! It releases endorphins, your feel-good brain chemicals. ‘We feel joyful when we dance because we are stimulated on several levels,’ says Dr Peter Lovatt, principal lecturer in psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. ‘Cognitively, because of mental planning, memory and spatial awareness; socially, because of the human engagement and shared movement; and physically, because it raises our heart rate. This combination can be exhilarating.’

And when it comes to your joints, it’s good news, too. ‘Dance can lead to improved joint function due to strengthening of the muscles, ligaments and tendons around the joint,’ says physiotherapist Rose Armstrong. ‘It also improves lubrication of joints due to increased secretion of synovial fluid—a viscous, cushioning liquid found in the cavities of most joints, which allows you to move more efficiently.’

There’s a style to suit everyone, so get reading to embrace your inner Darcy!
Argentine tango is great for... HIPS

The Argentine tango is essentially a walking dance, making it suitable for all ages, but the intensity can be increased by adding in lunges and twists.

'The woman is generally walking backwards in heels, leading with her toes,' says Flavia Cacace, ex-Strictly star and now in West-End show The Last Tango. 'This stretches out the hip-flexor muscles at the front of the hip, leading to a greater range of motion. The lunges performed also stretch these muscles.'

The unique posture of tango strengthens the muscles that stabilise and support the hips and pelvis. 'The top half of your body is chest to chest with your partner,' says Flavia, 'but the space increases as you go down to leave room for the legs to perform the steps (the man and woman are mostly doing different steps, rather than mirroring each other). This means that your weight is slightly forward on the balls of your feet. To maintain this position, your core and buttock muscles must be engaged.'

TRY THIS MOVE...
The forward ocho

- Stand with your feet together.
- Pivot on your left foot to make your hips face left, but keep your upper body facing forward.
- Step diagonally forward with your right foot.
- As your foot lands, pivot on that foot to make your hips face to the right.
- Step diagonally forward with your left foot, and pivot to make your hips face left, so you're walking in a zig-zag.

Check out this online video to learn how to do the forward ocho.
Ballet is great for... Ankles

From elegant pointed feet to explosive jumps and delicate landings, ballet is an all-round workout for this joint.

‘Preparation exercises done at the barre will work on your ankle strength and flexibility to prepare you for dancing,’ says Flk Swan, a classically trained ballerina and co-founder of online ballet-class provider, Sleek Technique. ‘The peroneal tendon that runs down the outside of the ankle is used a lot, as is the Achilles tendon, and strengthening them can develop a strong, stable ankle – useful for walking in heels during the party season!’

Ballet focuses intensely on how each joint affects your movement as you dance, ‘so it also boosts your proprioception,’ says Flk. ‘This means greater awareness of your joints and how they’re being used without looking at them.’

Try this move...

Strengthening at the barre

- Warm up by sitting down, raising your feet off the floor and rotating the feet in circles for 1-2 minutes.
- Stand with your hands on a barre or back of a chair, feet at ten to two (think of a clock).
- Pick up your right foot, point your toes and tuck it out of the way behind the back of your supporting ankle.
- Plie (bend) your standing leg, knee pointing over middle toes (not falling inward), keeping your foot evenly spread on the floor. Straighten back up.
- In the same position, rise up onto the ball of that foot, then lower. Start again from step two and repeat eight times on each leg.
Bollywood dance is a mixture of modern and traditional Indian styles, such as kathak and bhangra, and involves miming to the lyrics and telling a story. 'The arms are almost constantly raised due to the expressive nature of the dance form, and this builds strength in the upper-back and shoulder muscles that support the shoulder joint,' says Honey Kalaria, Bollywood dance teacher.

The neck is also used a great deal to move the head from side to side, up and down, and assist the facial expressions that are part of the storytelling. 'This increases flexibility in the neck and loosens the shoulder muscles,'

The art is achieving beautiful body alignment with graceful hip sways. 'The core muscles around the middle are recruited to support the hip and upper body work and this does wonders for your posture,' says Honey.

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**TRY THIS MOVE...**

**The raised-arm prayer position**

- Stand with your feet together and engage your abdominal muscles.
- Raise your hands up and clasp them together in a praying position, with thumbs overlapping, palms together and elbows out to the side, creating a diamond shape around your face.
- Keeping your face as level as possible, move your head from side to side, attempting to touch your ears against the inside of your upper arms.
- When your neck muscles get tired, keep your arms up and shrug your shoulders up and down. Keeping your arms aloft builds strength and stamina around the shoulders and upper back.

Check out this online video and learn how to dance a fun and easy Bollywood routine.
Waltz is great for...

KNEES

This most graceful and seemingly effortless of dances is, in fact, a great workout for keeping the knees strong and stable. The knee is a hinge joint, which means that its natural plane of motion is backward and forward. 'The waltz suits knees because it’s danced with the feet side by side, with no knee twist,' says Ian Parker, dance teacher and master trainer for Fitsteps.

The rise and fall movement of the dance, combined with the knees being slightly flexed throughout, strengthens the muscle groups that support the knee joint — the quadriceps and hamstrings. 'It especially works the vastus medialis, one of the quadricep muscles that runs down the inside of the knee,' says Ian.

TRY THIS MOVE...

The basic waltz lunge

- Stand with your feet together, hands on your hips.
- Lunge forward with your right leg, leading with your heel, and lunge into the knee. Keep your pelvis tucked under and your shoulders back.
- Push through your front foot to come back up, placing your feet together. Rise onto the balls of both feet.
- Lower and transfer weight onto your right foot as you prepare to step forward with the left to repeat the move.

Take care of your body

As with any exercise, it’s vital that you warm up beforehand. ‘The warm-up should be a pulse raiser and include dynamic stretches, which mimic the movements you will do in the dance,’ says physiotherapist Ross Armstrong. ‘A warm-up should last up to 15 minutes and gradually progress in intensity. Among other things, it improves muscle and tendon extensibility.’ After dancing, it’s important to cool down. ‘Static stretches for twenty seconds help to relax the muscles and improve joint flexibility,’ says Ross. ©