

women's running



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WHY BALLROOM DANCING IS GOOD FOR RUNNERS

Love Strictly? Discover the benefits of ballroom...



Inspired to put on your dancing shoes after watching this year's current series of Strictly Come Dancing? Believe it or not, if you're looking to improve your running performance, it might not be a bad idea...

Year on year, Strictly Come Dancing leaves us mesmerised by just how much celebrities improve their fitness, lose weight and tone up whilst on the show.

So much so, each year we see fitness dance classes popping up just about everywhere as part of the Strictly hype, with Strictly's dancers leading the way to improved fitness and weight loss with their dancing routines. Looking at the jaw-dropping bodies of the likes of 2015 Strictly contestant, Francesca Bridge and 2013 winner, Abbey Clancy, it's not hard to understand what the hype is all about. Particularly, when you see the weight loss accomplishments of celebrities such as Lisa Riley in 2012 and this year, Alison Hammond, who lost 5lbs in just two days! But can dancing (particularly ballroom dancing) make you a better runner? Teaming up with personal trainer and fitness expert Helena Philippou and Keith Hall leading physiotherapist at [Balance Performance Physiotherapy](#) we investigated the benefits. Its ability to develop muscle strength, increase flexibility, prevent injury, increase cardiovascular endurance performance and enhance skill are some of the strongest reasons why integrating dancing into a training plan is a good idea for runners.

Cross-training – develops strength, endurance, & resilience

Integrating cross-training into a runner's training plan is a somewhat contentious subject. Though experts often argue that cross-training not only puts runners at risk of injury in pursuing an activity which they do not specialise in, while also having the potential to develop muscles that can be detrimental to running, cross-training can have huge benefits for runners if planned carefully and the activities pursued are facilitative to running.

Physiotherapist, Keith Hall comments:

'In short, the only things that are going to make an athlete/runner perform better or run faster, in general, is by practicing their sport. However, for them to be able to develop the strength, endurance

and resilience to do so is by partaking in some form of specific strengthening or cross-training program.'

Building strength and flexibility in muscles also used for running is a great approach to cross-training, making ballroom dancing the perfect activity.

Fitness expert, Helen Philippou lists the below muscle groups as used for both ballroom dancing and running;

-Hip abductors

-Quadriceps

-Calves

-Hamstrings

-Glutes

-The upper back muscles (especially the area around the shoulders and upper arms including the triceps, the girdle and deltoid muscles)

-The abdominal and obliques

-The upper back muscles and upper arms including the triceps, the girdle and deltoid muscles.

Undoubtedly, muscles such as the hip abductors are worked out harder in ballroom dancing than running, in carrying out movements such as opening the legs and taking them to the side. Therefore, a ballroom dancing class is a great way of strengthening these under-used muscles areas to in turn enhance running performance.



Develops flexibility

Dancing can improve flexibility and dexterity, which is highly beneficial to runners. Having a good range of movements in your ankles and hip joints improves running technique, consequently enhancing performance.

Experts agree that the stretching involved in a dance class is good for runners, particularly as some runners are prone to skipping stretching before or after training.

Dr. Anne Hogan, Director of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance and editor of [The Song of the Body](#) advises that forms of dance such as ballet will not only improve a runner's strength and flexibility but their focus and concentration. She says, 'Participating in ballet classes (even once a week) can enhance flexibility and increase a runner's awareness of its importance to their training regime'.

2014 Strictly star and ballroom professional, Kristina Rihanoff agrees, commenting that as 'dancing makes your muscles elongated [therefore] increasing flexibility, it's a great alternative for runners to stretch their muscles.'



Injury & stiffness prevention

By integrating a good stretching routine into a training plan, runners will help to avoid common symptoms of stiffness.

'Runners suffer symptoms of stiffness of the outer hip, quads, calves and sometimes the lower back from rubbish technique like not keeping the posture up right and switching the core on to support the arms with less pressure when swinging whilst running' says fitness expert, Helen.

Stretching through regular dance classes will reduce this stiffness and also reduce the risk of injury.



Physiotherapist, Keith Hall also argues that ‘a strengthening effect on intrinsic foot muscles, peroneals and calves through dancing may [also] increase the resilience of the body to injury in these areas, therefore allowing the runner to train as they want to improve performance.’

Both Keith and Helen agree that athletes should integrate weight-training into a fitness plan to facilitate performance and lengthen careers in reducing the risk of conditions such as osteoporosis and brittle bone.

Improves cardiovascular endurance performance (interval training)

If you're a Strictly fan, it's not hard to see on a Saturday evening, the levels of cardiovascular strength required by the dancers to complete one of their intensive routines. Specifically, ballroom dancing focuses strongly on tempo changes – an intensive level of interval training, perfect for runners.

As ballroom dancing alternates between slow dancing and then builds speed, this mixture of high and low intensity movement, bringing the heart rate up and down is a fantastic activity for runners to carry out amongst their training.

‘This method of training will help runners to get their breathing under control as well as training ones endurance’ says Helen.



So, if you fancy mixing up training, ballroom dancing is not only a social and fun activity but will in fact help to improve certain aspects of your running performance. If you enjoy dancing and are a Strictly fan, try integrating a ballroom dancing class into your training once every two weeks, not forgetting to maintain regular weight-training sessions for muscle-strengthening and injury prevention.



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