

Fitness for Ballroom Dancers

by

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Ballroom dancing is an activity that can contribute to fitness but high level dancing requires a degree of fitness and that can't be obtained on the dance floor, alone. That is because fitness, like love, is a many splendored thing. In this article I will introduce the basic components of fitness and over the next few issues I will explore each topic as it relates to dancing and ways in which dancers can improve their fitness in each of these categories..

Physical fitness can be conceptualized as having the following components:

Elements of Fitness

Aerobic capacity

Strength

Flexibility

Balance

Timing and coordination

Nutrition

Rest

Psychological factors

Aerobic Capacity

Aerobic capacity is the element of fitness most people think of first. They might call it endurance or stamina or any other term that implies an ability to exercise for extended periods of time. Basically, we mean the ability of the heart to pump blood through out the circulatory system at heat rates well above those necessary for sitting or slow walking.

Closely related to the pumping heart are the lungs which provide for a transfer of oxygen into the bloodstream and the removal of carbon dioxide. When we exercise, we breathe faster and the heart beats faster. The objective is to circulate blood more rapidly through the lungs where the oxygen transfer takes place and then to move that blood to our muscles.

When the heart and lungs can't deliver enough oxygen to our muscles, they start to hurt, we begin to feel fatigued and soon we either slow down or collapse. Hopefully, the former before that latter!

Aerobic capacity is improved by repeatedly exercising until you are breathing faster and your heart is beating faster for 20-30 minutes at a time and at least 2-3 times per week.

A word of caution is always due on this subject. If you are currently sedentary, you should definitely talk to your doctor about your health before making any changes in your activity level. An occasional outing of dancing is not serious aerobic activity unless you dance every dance and do it with enthusiasm. Don't take chances, talk to your doctor first!

In the next issue we'll go into improving aerobic fitness in more detail.

Strength

Muscle strength is the ability to lift or move a weight once or twice but not necessarily many times in short period of time. Muscles are interesting parts of the body. Most of us know we burn fuel in our muscles and this burning is what uses oxygen up and converts it to carbon dioxide. Indeed, the burning is really a very, very low level fire and like a fire, it produces heat.