

# MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE?

By Martha Funnell, MS, RN, CDE

By now, everyone with diabetes (and pretty much everyone else) knows that exercise is good for your health. There are many benefits to being active. Exercise improves your physical health, your appearance and your emotional health. Yet, in spite of all of the information out there about activity, most Americans still do not exercise.

When you read about ways to become more active, one of the common tips is to find something you enjoy doing. That makes sense. But some people have a hard time thinking of anything they might enjoy. It may be that exercise brings back a lot of negative feelings for people—feeling clumsy or left out because they were not as skilled as their friends, being chosen last for the team or remembering how gym class was the worst part of the day. If you find yourself in the same boat, instead of trying to think of an exercise you might enjoy, come up with something you enjoy doing that would also help you to be more active.

Some people find that because they like to dance, it is a good physical activity for them. And it just might be a good program for you, too.

## DANCING IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Dancing as a form of exercise has the same benefits as other aerobic activities, and you burn a similar amount of calories. But, for many people, unlike jogging or riding a stationary bike, dancing works because it does not feel like exercise. Instead, it is a reminder of good music, good times and good friends.

### *Just like other types of exercise, dancing helps to:*

- improve your heart and blood vessel health
- increase flexibility and balance
- tone your muscles, including your core muscles
- relieve stress and prevent depression
- help prevent osteoarthritis
- lower your risk for Alzheimer's disease

## DANCING IS FUN

Because dancing is often a social activity, you may want to take a class that uses dancing as exercise. There are classes at all levels, and you do not need a partner. In many places, there are classes that offer different types of music and dances, including those that reflect faith and culture. You can try different kinds of dance, such as ballroom, salsa, folk or line dancing until you find one that suits you.

Or, if you're feeling a little like a wallflower, create your own dance program at home using all of your favorite songs. One of the benefits of dancing at home is you don't have to worry about your skill as a dancer. You can just close the shades, put on some music and get moving.

If you decide to start your own dancing workout, you will get more benefit if you use the usual guidelines for creating an exercise program: Start each session by warming up slowly, work up to your target heart rate and then cool down and stretch at the end of your session.

Choose music that matches each phase of the workout. Start with slow but uplifting music to begin. In the middle part of your workout, music with a strong beat will help you get your heart pumping and keep you energized. Finish with soothing music to help you cool down and relax. If you're not sure how to get started with your own dance program, check out the many dance DVDs and CDs on the Internet that you can buy to match the music and type of dancing you enjoy. Or visit your local library and see what they have to offer.

## LET'S DANCE!

The best exercise for your health and diabetes is the one you will do. Many people find that because dancing is fun and helps them feel better, it is the one exercise that really works for them. So put on your dancing shoes and go for it.

