



## *The benefits of dance for senior citizens*

The thought of exercise may make some people groan and sigh in anticipation. However, physical activity doesn't have to be grueling or boring. Engaging in dance is wonderful for healthy aging and keeping seniors strong while they have a ball.

A study conducted at St. Louis University used dance therapy intervention to reduce hip or knee pain and improve mobility in residents of a senior living community. Results showed a positive relationship between weekly dance classes and mobility strength. According to the lead author Jean Krampe, Ph.D., seniors have a higher risk for falls when they aren't stable on their feet.

"Doctors and nurses recognize gait speed as the sixth vital sign that can help us predict adverse outcomes for older adults," said Krampe, an assistant professor of nursing at SLU.

### **Study procedure**

This research was published in *Geriatric Nursing* and involved a 12-week study of retirement community residents, half of which attended dance classes. A customized dance therapy plan, dubbed Healthy-Steps, was created for the investigation. Healthy-Steps was designed for older people with knee or hip pain. It incorporates low-impact dance moves and can be done sitting or standing up.

Most of the participants were women, with an average age of 80. They all had pain or stiffness in their knees or hips, often due to arthritis. The intervention program entailed dancing for 45-minute sessions once or twice a week. Individuals in the group who completed the dance program reported a 39 percent reduction in their need for pain medication while the other half increased pain relief medication consumption by 21 percent.

### **Why choose dance?**

Many health organizations recommend seniors remain physically active to avoid or postpone health issues ranging from cognitive decline to cardiovascular disease. Dancing can be much more enjoyable than other aerobic exercises, but those interested may want to check with their doctor before beginning a new workout routine.

According to [Livestrong.com](http://Livestrong.com), dance can be used as a method of physical therapy because it improves both gait and balance. Most classes don't require any experience with dance or practice between sessions. Most importantly, many community centers and retirement homes offer free or inexpensive dance classes for senior citizens.

Enrolling in one of these age-specific programs ensures the moves will be more appropriate for individual strength levels. Additionally, they provide great opportunities for socialization with other seniors.

