Section 4

Dancing is something that humans do when they want to have a good time. It's a (1) ....., found in all cultures. But what's only been discovered recently is that dancing not only makes US feel good, it's also extremely good for our health. Dancing, like other forms of exercise, releases hormones, such as dopamine, which make US feel relaxed and happy. And it also reduces (2) .....

Dancing is also a sociable activity, which is another reason it makes US feel good. One study compared people's enjoyment of dancing at home in front of a video with dancing in a group in a studio.

The people dancing in a group reported feeling happier, whereas those dancing alone did not.

In another experiment, university researchers at York and Sheffield took a group of students and sent each of them into a lab where music was played for five minutes. Each had to choose from three options: to (3) ....., to cycle on an exercise bike while they listened, or to get up and dance. All were given (4) ..... to perform before and after. The result showed that those who chose to dance showed much more creativity when doing (5)

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Doctor Lovatt at the University of Hertfordshire believes dance could be a very useful way to help people suffering from (6) ..... He thinks dance should be (7) ..... to help people overcome issues such as depression.

It's well established that dance is a good way of encouraging adolescent girls to take exercise but what about older people? Studies have shown that there are enormous benefits for people in their sixties and beyond. One of the great things about dance is that (8) ..... to participation. Anyone can have a go, even those whose standard of fitness is quite low.

Dance can be especially beneficial for older adults who can't run or (9) ....., or for those who don't want to. One 2015 study found that even a gentle dance workout helps to (10) ..... And there's plenty of evidence which suggests that dancing lowers the risk of falls, which could result in a broken hip, for example, by helping people to (11) .....

There are some less obvious benefits of dance for older people too. One thing I hadn't realised before researching this topic was that dance isn't just (12) ..... It also requires a lot of concentration because you need to remember different steps and routines. For older people, this kind of activity is especially important because it forces their brain to process things more quickly and to (13) .....

Current research also shows that dance promotes (14) ..... in older participants, which can last up to a week after a class. Participants report feeling less tired and (15) ..... to be more active and do daily activities such as gardening or walking to the shops or a park.

Ballroom or country dancing, both popular with older people, have to be done in groups. They require collaboration and often involve touching a dance partner, all of which encourages interaction on the dance floor. This helps to (16) ..... and can reduce older people's (17) ....., which is a huge problem in many countries.

I also looked at the benefits of Zumba. Fifteen million people in 180 countries now regularly take a Zumba class, an aerobic workout based on Latin American dance moves. John Porcari, a professor of exercise and sport science at the University of Wisconsin, analysed a group of women who were Zumba regulars and found that a class lasting 40 minutes burns about 370 calories. This is similar to (18) ..... like step aerobics or kickboxing.

A study in the American Journal of Health Behavior showed that when women with obesity did Zumba three times a week for 16 weeks, they lost an average of 1.2 kilos and lowered their percentage of body fat by 1%. More importantly, the women enjoyed the class so much that they (19) ..... and continued to attend classes at least once a week - very unusual for an aerobic exercise programme.

Dance is never going to compete with (20) ..... when it comes to physical fitness gains, but its popularity is likely to keep on rising because it's such a fun way to keep fit.