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From a spiritual way of life to an energetic and toning work out **Belly Dancing**

By Donna the Belly Dancer

Belly dancing is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) dance forms. Its exotic movements and graceful gestures have been passed down through the ages adding more refinement and embellishment with the passing years. It originated in Egypt, North Africa, Lebanon and Turkey. It was a dance done by women for women. History shows evidence of Egyptian tomb paintings as far back as the fourteenth century BC whose callisthenic positions depict that of belly dancing movements. Today, belly dancing is used for both an exotic dance form and exercise. In recent years belly dancing has become a popular fitness trend across America. This once foreign dance is now used for weight loss, toning and fitness.

Belly dancing gives the mind and body definition with a complete workout. The movements require mental focus to keep your balance and to coordinate the steps into a pattern. Belly dancing is also uniquely designed for the female body with isolation movements of the abs, hips, legs, chest and arms. The best characteristics of the dance are its smooth, flowing, complex and sensual movements intermixed with fast vibrations and shimmy type movements. The music sets the pace for how energetic the dance and work out will be.

Dancing burns as many calories as walking, swimming or most aerobic activity. It is great for posture, balance and stamina increase. Dancing will also improve muscle tone and strength.

Isolation of parts such as the stomach, legs, hips and chest requires a great deal of muscle control. The more control you have over a muscle the better chance you have of properly toning and strengthening them to your desired shape. Belly dancing's weight loss benefits can vary depending on the length and intensity of the workout. Most low impact classes can burn between 288-306 calories (for a person weighing 140-150lbs) and 347-369 calories (for a person weighing 170-180lbs). A faster paced dance class focusing on more shimmy and bouncy movements would burn 416-442 calories (for a person weighing 140-150lbs) and 501-533 calories (for a person weighing 170-180lbs). Many women are looking to liven up their work out routine with

dancing, which not only helps your body look and feel great, but teaches you an art form that has been handed down and respected over centuries.

Belly dancing is also a great workout for pregnant women. As with any physical exercise when you are pregnant, you should always consult your doctor first before beginning classes.

In ancient times belly dancing was used both for fertility and help with the birthing process as it uses many of the muscles necessary for giving birth. Your lower abdomen muscles, thighs and pelvic muscles are all strengthened and taught to be controlled. With your doctors permission, belly dancing can help to alleviate back pain, muscle cramps and even joint pain. Belly dancing is mostly low impact and concentrates on strengthening muscles in the torso, which is a necessity in pregnancy and the birthing process.

Today in America belly dancing is a conglomeration of many styles of dance - not just Middle Eastern or Oriental styles. The dance has even expanded to include both female and male genders. Despite great regional variations and the different styles of rhythms and instruments used, there is usually a great emphasis on percussion. Whether it is for fitness, spiritual health or to learn a timeless dance, belly dancing is one of the best exercises with an exciting and sensual twist.

There are many dancers across America and in the local Philadelphia area that are skilled in the various styles of belly dance consisting but not limited to: Turkish, Egyptian, Lebanese, Persian, Tribal, Fusion and American Cabaret. Lessons can be given in class form, private and/or workshops. Teachers will shape the instructions to match the skills and motivation of the student(s) or class. To find belly dancing classes suitable for your style or for more information about belly dancing, try searching

- www.shira.net
- www.thehipcircle.com
- www.bellydance.org
- www.bhuz.com

You can also contact your local gym or dance studio to see if classes are available.

Many belly dancers are now contributing their talent to *Shake for the Cure*. I recently hosted and performed at a breast cancer benefit on October 28, 2007 to raise money for the Susan G. Komen foundation. Other premier dancers such as Shelley, Suffiyah, Mirjana and the troupe Mirage (featuring Zareen, Alima and Lorelei) were kind enough to donate their time as well as their money to help this great cause. The benefit was held at Casablanca Restaurant in Warrington, owned by Sam and Adam Ashoush, and offered a full Moroccan buffet as well as live entertainment and door prizes. The entire buffet was prepared to perfection and included such authentic dishes as hummus, Moroccan salad, lemon chicken, lamb and beef kabobs, lentil and baklava. The benefit was a great success and will now be an annual fund raising event held on the last Sunday of every October. Special thanks to all who contributed their time and expenses to this worthy cause.

Happy Dancing!!

Belly Dancer Donna has been a professional belly dancer for eight years in the tri-state area and appears regularly at Casablanca Restaurant and Little Marakesh Restaurant. She has been teaching belly dancing for five years, and currently holds classes at LA Fitness in Bensalem and Oxford Valley. She learned the Turkish style of dance from her grandmother, Caraina, and later learned the Egyptian style from Lina Miller (who also appears at Casablanca). She has completed various workshops from such renowned performers as Sahra Saeeda, Jillina and many others.



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