

The Health Benefits of Scottish Country Dancing

It is well established that participation in adequate amounts of regular physical activity can improve health and reduce the risk of premature death by helping to; achieve and maintain a healthy body weight; lower blood cholesterol; reduce blood pressure in people who already have hypertension (high blood pressure); improve self-esteem and reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, depression; build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints; and keep older adults physically strong and better able to move about without falling or becoming too tired.^{1, 2}

Regular physical activity can also help to reduce the risk of; heart disease; stroke; having a second heart attack in people who have already had one; developing high blood pressure; developing type 2 diabetes; developing colon cancer and possibly other cancers; and developing Alzheimer's Disease.

The Governments of the UK³, Australia⁴, Canada⁵, New Zealand⁶, and USA⁷ recognising the importance of encouraging regular physical activity have all produced comprehensive physical activity guidelines for their citizens. The medical profession, especially General Practitioners, has a major role in promoting regular physical activity in the population.

Which type of physical activity should people choose? A study from the University of Strathclyde, in 2010, showed **Scottish country dancing** to be superior to other forms of physical activity in building levels of fitness⁸. A Canadian study found Scottish country dancing to be superior to folk and square dancing⁹, and research from the University of Cumbria, published in January 2014,¹⁰ suggests that participation in Scottish country dancing could reduce the ageing process. It also helps to prevent dementia through the complex interplay of cognitive skills needed to memorise steps and formations, interaction with other dancers, and the effect of dance music on the mind¹¹. The social aspect of Scottish country dancing develops a sense of community and enjoyment, which encourages continued participation, and long term involvement, and is linked with good health, a positive attitude and longevity^{12, 13}.

The benefits of Scottish country dance have been recognised by the Scottish Parliament which supported a motion, in 2012, welcoming the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society's Health strategy¹⁴.

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, May 2014

¹ Physical Activity and Health: a report of the US Surgeon General, 1999.

² Center for Disease Control, Atlanta.

³ Exercise Guidelines, CMO for England, 2011.

⁴ Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, Australian Dept of Health, 2014.

⁵ Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2011.

⁶ NZ Department of Health and Sport New Zealand, 2014.

⁷ Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, 2008.

⁸ Dougall P, Dewhurst S, Univ of Strathclyde, August 2010.

⁹ Erison M, An Evaluation of the Health and Recreational Benefits of SCD, Ontario, Canada

¹⁰ Dewhurst S, Active Ageing Group, Univ of Cumbria, Jan 2014.

¹¹ Beck C, Caregiver Supervised Exercise Benefits in Individuals with Alzheimer's, JAMA, Oct 2003.

¹² Reston VA, Amer Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

¹³ Finlayson K, Dissertation, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2010

¹⁴ Personal communications to Ruth Beattie, past Chair RSCDS, from Alex Salmond, First Minister for Scotland, and Gil Paterson MSP