Give it a go

By Elle Cecil

The health benefits of dancing for seniors range from improving your physical health to creating strong social connections that increase your sense of wellbeing.

A 2018 study by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) showed a positive relationship between dancing and the physical and emotional health of older Australians.

Participants in the study experienced improved flexibility, boosted energy levels and better posture. Further studies have found that dancing can slow or even reverse the signs of ageing in the brain.

Among these benefits, older Australians are likely to experience an improvement in balance, coordination and spatial awareness, which in turn could reduce their likelihood of falls.

Dancing also provides an increase in heart rate, encouraging the movement of oxygen throughout the body. This has shown positive effects on heart and lung condition, and has the potential to lessen the risk of conditions such as cardiovascular disease. Regular dance also assists in weight management, toning muscle, improving strength and reducing joint pain.

The benefits of dancing aren't just physical. Regular dancing has been shown to increase the size of the hippocampus, which is the region of the brain responsible for spatial navigation and memory formation.

Not only did study participants enjoy a range of physical and mental progress, they also experienced a shift in overall mood, self-esteem and confidence. This is attributed to a combination of the effects of physical exercise and the social interactions and connections formed during the dance classes.

Some things to consider

Are you looking to dance on your own or with a partner? Perhaps you'd like to join a group

dance class, or maybe you'd prefer private lessons. What sort of dance style are you looking to engage in? The options are endless. Ballet, line dancing, Latin or salsa dancing, waltzing, tap dancing, dance aerobics and even seated dance classes are all popular styles you can choose from.

Before you pull on your dancing shoes, it's important to consult your doctor or medical professional. They can provide you with proper advice tailored to your health needs.

Once you've got the go ahead, you should make sure that you hydrate properly before, during and after you dance. Warming up and cooling down is also crucial to avoid stiffness or injury. Take care not to over work yourself on the dance floor. Remember, it's all about getting active and having fun. Now get out there and bust a move!

Tips for recognising depression in seniors

Though around 10 to 15 people in every 100 older people experience depression, most are less likely than people in younger age groups to report depression.

Depression in old age often goes undetected and may be wrongly attributed to age, dementia or poor health. Older people may not even believe or accept that they are sad or depressed. Signs of depression in adults over 65 may include unexplained physical symptoms, memory loss and behavioural changes.

Causes of depression in older people

The causes of depression in older people vary and depend on when the depression was first experienced.

If the person first experienced depression earlier in life, the likely causes will include genetic and personality factors and life experiences. If they first experienced it later in life, physical health problems may be the cause.

Social isolation and loneliness and personal loss are also common causes of depression in people aged over 65.

Treatment of depression in older people

Treatments for depression in old age are similar to the treatments given to other age groups, although they can differ in the way in which they are applied.

Age does not reduce the effectiveness of treatments for depression, although medication may take longer to work in older people. However, if depression in old age is left untreated it can have many adverse effects.

Lifestyle changes in mid-life may be the

Older Aussies struggling with their mental health often don't recognise the symptoms or reach out for help. Picture: ISTOCK

key to preventing depression in old age.

Sources:

- Black Dog Institute, Sane Australia, Beyond Blue.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- MindSpot Clinic (anyone suffering from anxiety or depression) — call 1800 61 44 34
- Beyond Blue (anyone feeling depressed or anxious) — call 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- Black Dog Institute (people affected by depression and extreme mood swings) — online help
- Lifeline (anyone experiencing a crisis or thinking about suicide) — call 13 11 14 or chat online
- Suicide Call Back Service (anyone thinking about suicide) — call 1300 659 467

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