

The following article is reprinted from the Colorado Round Dance Association newsletter.

## Dancing for Your Health Sandi & Dan Finch

Were you part of the National Dance Day celebrations? If you were dancing somewhere Saturday, July 22, 2017, you were. The fourth Saturday in July was recognized by Congressional resolution in 2010 as a day to raise awareness about the benefits of dance to maintain good health and combat obesity. Flash mobs, dancing in the open at The Music Center, grooving on your own—YouTube is witness to the many ways it was celebrated this year.

Time magazine has now told us dancing is good for us. A headline in its March 4, 2016, issue proclaimed: “People who took dance class improved their fitness three times more than non-dancers.” The story reported on research by the American Heart Association which concluded that even if you are up in years and out of shape, you should be dancing. Aimed at Latinos, the study recruited 57 people, all sedentary and aged 65, and assigned them to a program for four months. Some took health education classes, the others took classes in Merengue, Cha Cha And Salsa. The dance group moved better and showed more improvement in their medical conditions than the control group.

NPR (Southern California Public Radio) aired a broadcast May 3, 2016, about a University of Oxford study that showed people who were dancing in sync with others around them (the same moves to the same music) had a higher pain tolerance than those who danced on their own.

What? The study concluded that the brain interprets dancing in sync with others as good for you, an evolutionary result where the brain experiences a sense of reward when doing things with and for other people. Sounds like a good argument for round dancing to me.

Woman’s World magazine, in its August 1, 2016 issue, revived the 2003 research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City that concluded that frequent dancing can make you smarter. Stimulating the mind by dancing can ward off Alzheimer’s disease and other dementia, as well as reducing stress and increasing a sense of well-being. The study followed 469 people over age 75 for five years as they engaged in sports and did sedentary activity like reading or working crossword puzzles. One of the surprises reported was that golf, swimming, bicycling - pure physical activity - offered no protection against dementia. The only physical activity that did was dancing. In fact, dancing cut the risk of dementia by 76%, more than any other activity.

Why, you might wonder? When brain cells die, and synapses weaken with age, neural connections are lost. The brain will “re-wire” if it needs to. What you needed to golf or bike, you learned years ago. Dancing requires some decision making, learning new steps, listening to your partner, reacting to what you lead, all of which increase the connectivity between brain neurons. The study also noted that whatever you do, do it frequently. Seniors who did crossword puzzles four days a week had a lower risk of dementia than those who did them once a week. When you’re done with that daily puzzle, grab your dancing shoes and get ready to rev up the brain.