



Participants of Zumba find the sustained, aerobic workout to be a great calorie burner.

Photo by Roger Steinbrock

Exercise provides many benefits for the body - heart health, muscle toning and fat burning. Unfortunately, one of exercise's shortcomings is no matter how beneficial it is for you, it rarely provides any fun. But thanks to a fast-paced, calorie burning dance workout which resembles a night at the club more than a morning at Club Med, Zumba is making dull, joyless exercise a thing of the past.

HISTORY

According to zumba.com, the Latin-inspired workout was created in Colombia during the mid 1990's by Alberto "Beto" Perez, a celebrity fitness trainer. One day, Perez forgot the music he used to teach his aerobics class and was forced to lead the group with cassette tapes from his car, which were mostly comprised of salsa and merengue music.

Through this last-minute improvisation, Perez manufactured a workout which soon gained immense popularity. Zumba was born.

In 1999, after his success in Colombia, Perez brought the class to the United States. He teamed with two young entrepreneurs to create a global company, based on the Zumba fitness philosophy, to teach classes all over the world. Today there are more than 20,000 trained instructors in 35 countries worldwide teaching an estimated 4 million Zumba fans.

WHY ZUMBA?

As many people will tell you, the real question to be asking is, 'Why not Zumba?'

Jo Ellis, recreation programming supervisor, understands

the attraction to the Zumba workout stems from its variety.

"It is not a typical aerobics class, it's very unique," Ellis said. "The routines go with the music and not with the count. You're consistently doing something different which keeps it from becoming boring."

All the variation in body movement associated with dancing certainly has its benefits. For those looking to shed a few pounds, Zumba's sustained, aerobic workout is a great calorie burner.

According to zumbacize.com, one hour of Zumba has been estimated to burn anywhere from 600 to 1,000 calories. The amount of calories burned varies and depends on fitness level, age, weight and intensity of the workout, but the class always promotes overall health for the entire body.

Rosa Middlebrooks, a class participant, enrolled in Zumba to keep herself healthy. Exercise is extremely important to her because she is a type 2 diabetic.

"I take Zumba to keep my [blood] sugar in check," Middlebrooks said. "I go to classes three days a week and that's it. It is more than enough."

For Middlebrooks the class is not all about exercise though, it's about the music.

"I have never been a club person, but if you close your eyes and dance to the beat it almost feels like you are dancing in a Venezuelan club."

WORRIED ABOUT HOW YOU'LL LOOK?

With many dance and aerobics classes, individuals who are self-conscious about their movements may be worried

they will look foolish in class, but instructors and class participants alike don't feel this is an issue.

Susan King, Zumba instructor, understands some people may feel uncomfortable in a group exercise-setting, but she believes it isn't important to get steps and movements exactly right.

"I always tell my class that this isn't a performance," King said. "It's exercise...but it's fun exercise. You just have to get into it and feel the music."

Another class participant, Sue Messerly, thinks the class provides comfort to anyone willing to try, even if they have no prior dance experience.

"Routines are easy to follow," Messerly said. "I think anyone coming in would feel right at home."

PROGRAMS

Ellis said she started offering Zumba classes after one of her fitness instructors told her about the dance workout. She researched the class on the Internet and the first Zumba class began in winter 2007.

From its humble beginning, Zumba has grown into one of the department's most popular recreation classes, Ellis said. The Lawrence Parks and Recreation Department now offers several different Zumba classes at a wide range of times and for varying skill levels, six days a week.

Classes such as Early Bird Zumba offer easy-to-follow routines featuring aerobic/fitness interval training with a combination of fast and slow rhythms that tone and sculpt the body.

For those looking for a more challenging workout experience, the department offers more advanced classes like Zumba Interval, which combines high energy and motivating music with unique dance moves and combinations that improve



Susan King, Zumba instructor, demonstrates "side steps" while leading a class through a workout.

Photo by Roger Steinbrock



Sue Messerly, Zumba participant, moves through her steps during one of the class' many up-tempo songs.

Photo by Chris Bristow

coordination, increase cardiovascular strength and flexibility.

Zumba classes are also available for the young and young at heart, offered for children ages six to 12 years old as well as individuals over 50 years old. Zumba Gold was a class Ellis felt seniors would especially enjoy.

"The smiles on the [seniors'] faces are priceless," Ellis said. "You can tell they are really enjoying themselves."

For those looking to try out Zumba without making the full commitment of enrolling in a class, Ellis has developed Zumba Jam Party. The class serves as a great introduction for those who wonder about the intensity of workouts because people sign up for individual sessions rather than an eight-week course. The sessions are held on Sundays for a two-hour period.

For a complete listing of Zumba classes, please see page 26. For Zumba Gold, please see page 16.

WHAT TO WEAR AND BRING

It is important you have everything you need for an enjoyable experience when attending Zumba. After all, Zumba is supposed to be fun. Clothing should be comfortable and not interfere with exercise. Participants should remember to also bring a towel.

Layering T-shirts over tank tops is a good idea too. As you warm up throughout the class, you can always shed down if you become too hot.

Water. Water. Water. According to Elizabeth Quinn, exercise physiologist and fitness consultant, you need 8 to 10 fluid ounces every 10 to 15 minutes during exercise. For the typical Zumba class that means you need to drink anywhere from one to two quarts of water, plus additional fluids to replenish your body after the workout.

After all, you might be feeling a profound new sense of energy and vitality when you leave your first Zumba class. Middlebrooks could not agree more.

"The class is exhilarating," she said. "When you get done you feel like you could enter a merengue dance contest if there was one outside."

Maybe in the next activities guide she will get her chance.