

LIVING WELL

If you've not heard of Latin dance class Zumba, where have you been? Getting fit has never been so much fun!

Let's go Latin!

If you're bored of slogging it out on your own at the gym or you find aerobics classes uninspiring, this may be the perfect workout. Anyone who loves dancing but lacks confidence will love **Zumba**.

WHAT IS ZUMBA?

Zumba promises to party you into shape. It's a Latin-inspired, dance-based fitness class with easy-to-follow choreography that will have you smiling as you sweat. Rather than counting reps, as in traditional aerobics, you let the music move you. You'll be shaking your booty to the rhythms of salsa, hip-hop, reggae, merengue and bhangra. It's suitable for all ages and fitness levels, and is guaranteed to boost your energy while blasting calories.

Created in 2001, Zumba is taught in 125 countries to more than 12m people each week, making it the world's most successful dance-fitness programme. And it almost didn't happen. Colombian fitness instructor Alberto 'Beto' Perez describes founding the Zumba movement as a 'happy accident'. One day, he forgot his usual tunes for an aerobics class and was forced to improvise with salsa and merengue he had on him. His class loved the new approach and a craze was born.

THE BODY BENEFITS

Zumba is brilliant cardiovascular exercise. You move constantly, raising your heart rate and

burning up to 700 calories an hour. If it's weight loss you're after, sign up for regular Zumba classes.

'I love Zumba because it feels like a big party rather than an exercise class,' says Claire, 30, from London. 'It's great fun, so you don't notice you're working hard, but by the end of the class you're drenched in sweat and feel as if you've really worked your whole body.'

Because dancing is a weight-bearing exercise, you'll also protect your bones, tone your muscles and increase your strength. The workouts are carefully designed to include 'hidden' strength-training moves such as lunges and squats, so you'll work your legs and glutes. If you try one of the new Zumba Toning classes, you'll hold special sticks that help tone your upper body, too.

And don't forget the balance and coordination dancing brings, which is a surefire route to strong and sexy abs.

All forms of exercise relieve stress, anxiety and depression, thanks to the feel-good endorphins

they release. Add the party atmosphere of a Zumba class, and it's a way to beat the blues.

HOW TO GET STARTED

More classes are springing up. As well as original Zumba, you'll find variations including Zumba Gold (for active, older exercisers), Aqua Zumba (a 'party in the pool'), Zumba Toning (using sticks to add a sculpting element), Zumba in the Circuit (combining Zumba moves with strength-training stations) and even Zumbatomic (a dance party for kids from four to 12). From gym chains to church halls, you won't have to travel far. Go to zumba.com to find your nearest class.

If you'd prefer to practise in private, clear some space and start the party in your living room with the range of Zumba workout DVDs (see Try this, above). You can also buy Zumba games for Wii, PS3 and Xbox 360.



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CELEBS WITH ZUMBA FEVER

Victoria Beckham, Sugababe Heidi Range and Kelly Brook (left) are said to be Zumba fans. Over in the States, Michelle Obama, Jennifer Lopez and Kirstie Alley rate it



DAVID J. PHILLIPS



Try this

Can't get to a class? Work out at home with the Zumba Fitness Set, which includes four DVDs and six workouts, plus a pair of Zumba toning sticks. \$49.99. johnlewis.com