

**Introducing the new Dr Daisy Blog at  
Menopause Matters. This month!**

# **Strictly Menopause!**

**Yes - it's that time of year again!**

Time to pour the wine, turn up the volume, and prepare to be dazzled with sequins and bling!

As a very (unprofessional) ballroom dancer myself, I am completely hooked on Strictly. We are glued to the series. We even watch 'It Takes Two' every weekday evening, and dance in front of the TV! The night of the Strictly Final is sacrosanct in our calendar – and when it's over – oh my goodness – we need therapy! What on earth will we do instead to replace the Strictly obsession over the next 12 months!?

But as I watched the line up of new celebrities and dancers last night, something struck me! Just look carefully at all those smiling faces – glamorous they may be but guess what? - There are a lot of peri/post menopausal women on Strictly! And when I thought about it some more, dancers are in fact - prone to problems with hormones! So here it is - Strictly Menopause!

**So am I crazy? - I don't think so. Read on -**

Dancers tend to be, very fit and very thin. Many female athletes, regularly doing so much sport, may find that their periods stop. No periods, means not producing eggs i.e. not ovulating. Not ovulating means low levels of oestrogen.

Low levels of oestrogen are not advantageous for female health. In fact, this is very similar to what is happening to most women at the time of a natural menopause. This is around the age of 50 of course - so a rather older age group.

**Let's look at the facts**

- Dancers are a high risk group as far as diet and weight are concerned. Dancers are more likely to become obsessed with body image and develop psychological conditions such as anorexia or bulimia. They may have obsessive eating patterns and consequently poor nutrition. In the long term, inadequate intake of calcium, vitamins and other important dietary constituents, can lead to loss of bone mass and increase the risk of bone thinning - osteopenia and osteoporosis. These are serious medical conditions that predispose to fractures of long bones, reduced mobility, loss of independence and may be fatal. Maintaining good bone health is vital for well being.



- In addition 40% of dancers smoke, compared to 15% of women currently smoking in the UK. Smoking has overwhelmingly been shown to be a major cause of many different types of cancer. 2 in 3 long term smokers will die from a smoking related disease. Smoking is the single biggest avoidable risk factor for cancer.

- Dancers are often away from home. They suffer a lot of stress, and are prone to depression. Their income is generally low.

### **But what about dancing for the rest of us – the mere mortals?**

On the contrary, dancing for recreation, has been shown time and time again to be extremely beneficial for health. In a very interesting article in the Huffington Post, Lindsay Holmes describes the numerous benefits of dancing for health. Quoting an exercise physiologist Fablo Comana, she writes, *“Dancing, plain and simple, is fun in a way a monotonous treadmill never will be!”*

She also describes the physical health benefits of dancing on 5 different body systems – *“cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, muscular endurance, body composition and muscular strength.”* Also the positive affect of dancing on agility, balance, brain power, coordination and our body reactions.

Let’s also get down to the nitty-gritty! With dancing, we get up close and personal! The wellbeing effect of touch and closeness has long been realised. Dancing is both a social, and a sociable activity. This is particularly apparent if dancing within a group.

Regular dancing has also been shown to reduce the likelihood of diseases such as dementia, and Parkinson’s Disease. Very importantly, dancing may also help reduce the risk of falls in the elderly.

The contrast is strange isn’t it? The health risks of a career of dancing in youth, compared to the health benefits of dancing as a form of regular exercise in later life. Dancers must be made aware of how to best look after themselves during their working lifetime. Taking up dancing as we age however, gets us off the sofa, stretches our joints and ligaments, stresses our long bones, and fires up the heart and the lungs.

I would like to encourage career dancers to consult their doctors about health and hormones, and consider how best they could reduce their risks. Hormones are essential for

good health. Oestrogen makes us the women we are today. It has positive effects on breast, ovaries, fertility, the heart and the skeleton. Our young female bodies were not designed to be without oestrogen and the health consequences of living without it can be serious, as outlined earlier on.

One common solution for a younger dancer might be to take the Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill. This can be taken (almost) continuously, to avoid having periods, gives excellent contraception and acts as a form of hormone replacement. This would need to be discussed and prescribed as appropriate by her GP/ clinic doctor. Women over 35 who smoke, are not permitted to take the Combined Pill, so this warrants further consideration. But being 35 and over, and smoking is NOT a contraindication to hormone replacement therapy for example. An option might then be the use of a Mirena IUS, with some HRT oestrogen. For the rest of us – what can I say! Whether you choose to take HRT or not – You can still put on your favourite music, climb off that computer chair, and get boogying! Or better still Google your local dance school and off you go! You'll love it! What are you waiting for? – You might just get addicted to dance – like me!

## References

### Ash fact sheet: Smoking and Cancer

<http://ash.org.uk/download/04-smoking-and-cancer/>

### Dancing Isn't Just Fun — It's Really Good For Your Health

By Lindsay Holmes

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dancing-health-benefits\\_us\\_56a79cfae4b0172c65942cf4](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/dancing-health-benefits_us_56a79cfae4b0172c65942cf4)

<https://www.webmd.com/parkinsons-disease/news/20070423/exercise-may-help-prevent-parkinsons#1>

### Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly

Joe Verghese, M.D et al

N Engl J Med 2003; 348:2508-2516 June 19, 2003 DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa022252

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa022252#t=article>

### Science Daily

#### Dance therapy improves seniors' gait, balance, researchers say. April 17, 2010

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/04/100416144617.htm>

