

- Dance

How dancing could improve mental health

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FOR many, dancing is just a fun and energetic activity. But a study published in the British Medical Journal suggests that it can be much more than that. In fact, dancing could be a promising treatment for depression.

The authors of this research came to this conclusion after analysing the results of 218 studies involving a total of 14,170 patients over the age of 18 suffering from a major depressive disorder. They compared the mental health benefits of several types of physical activity, including cycling, jogging, tai chi and dance, with psychotherapy and antidepressant medication. The aim was to see if any of these physical activities proved effective in combating depressive symptoms.

The researchers found that walking, jogging, yoga and strength training had particularly positive effects on depression, especially when these activities were performed at an intense pace. They also noted that dancing significantly reduced participants' depressive symptoms, leading them to assert that this sport “appears to be a promising treatment for depression”.

However, the academics point out in their meta-analysis that “the small number of studies, low number of participants, and biases in the study designs (prohibit them) from recommending dance more strongly” in the treatment of depression.

Whatever the case, there is no doubt that dancing is a physical activity that benefits both body and mind. The sport not only activates many muscles, but also the cerebral system. Indeed, dancing stimulates a whole host of cognitive processes simultaneously, from coordinating movements to the rhythm of the music to remembering steps. It also promotes psychological well-being by increasing the release of oxytocin (the famous “love hormone”) and dopamine (the so-called “happy hormone”), and reducing the secretion of stress-related hormones such as cortisol.

So there is no reason to deprive yourself of the many virtues of this physical activity. All the more so as there are so many different types of dance to choose from, to be enjoyed solo, in pairs or in groups. Meanwhile, separate research from Australia, published in the Sports Medicine journal, reports that dancing improves the psychological well-being and cognitive capacity of those who take part in structured dance of any genre, from Zumba, salsa and modern jazz to waltz or even line dancing.