



ADVENTURES IN FITNESS

WITH DANETTE M. WATT

THIS MONTH'S ADVENTURE

SALSA DANCING

INTENSITY LEVEL

BASIC MODERATE HIGH

I love to watch professional dancers glide, tap and sashay their way across the floor. My feet start to move in time to the music and I imagine myself joining them, my partner effortlessly leading me across the floor.

Reality is much, much different. I have two left feet, and I'm rigid as a board.

When I was 5, my mother enrolled my sister and me in dance lessons. I quit after the first day. But I often wish I had stuck with it. So when it came time to try a new fitness activity, I knew what I was going to do.

I had to get back out on the dance floor.

My new motivation came from two inspirations: a recent viewing of *Dirty Dancing* and the many people I know who are regulars at a salsa club.

Many salsa clubs offer \$5 lessons—perfect for someone like me who needs a crash course on the steps and a taste of what can be done on the dance floor. About a dozen budding dancers came together the night my husband and I went to the Atomic Cowboy in St. Louis, Mo., and half of us were newbies.

Our teacher, Kelly Brown, has been dancing for 23 years and teaching for 18. He showed us a few fundamental steps—the basic salsa, the cumbia and the abajo—building one on the other and adding music each time to help us string the steps together. And because you don't salsa alone, we divided into two lines to practice leading or following.

My first partner was Rod, an experienced dancer. The poor guy had to keep telling me to relax. "Don't look down. Loosen your hips. Feel the music, don't think about it."

I channeled my inner Jennifer Grey from *Dirty Dancing* and giggled as I pictured Patrick Swayze mocking her "spaghetti arms."

By the end of the hour, I was ready to call it a night. Dancing isn't a strenuous activity, per se, but you are continually moving so it's easy to break into a sweat.

More than that, it was a challenge for me in a different way. I like to take charge and be in control. But I had to let go and trust my partner, close my eyes and allow myself to feel the music.



Danette learns some new steps from dance instructor Kelly Brown for just \$5 at a local salsa club.



READY TO CUT A RUG?

What are the benefits?

Physical and mental benefits include heart and lung conditioning, balance, coordination, increased self-confidence, laughter.

Where do I go?

Salsa clubs and dance schools can be found in most cities and larger towns.

Is dancing right for me?

Dancing is great for all ages and sizes of people, although salsa may not be your thing. Try ballroom, folk, jazz or even belly dancing.

How much will it cost me?

Depends. Look for a club that offers free or low-cost dance lessons. Formal dance lessons will cost more but the small group setting is worth the price for the teacher's attention.

What equipment do I need?

Soft-soled shoes so you can slide across the floor.