

All that jazz: Kids in dance classes don't get enough exercise, study says

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Steven Jackson of the Atlanta Falcons dances with students at Shiloh Point Elementary School as part of the NFL's Play 60 Campaign to encourage kids to get 60 minutes of exercise a day, Dec. 3, 2013, in Cumming, Georgia. Photo: AP Photo/David Goldman

Dance classes might be big on fun, but a new study says they are surprisingly light on exercise.

A medical magazine called *Pediatrics* reports that only 8 percent of kids in after-school dance programs are getting enough exercise to meet government guidelines for physical activity. For teens, that number is only 6 percent.

Researchers from San Diego State University and the University of California, San Diego studied 264 dance students. Girls wore tracking devices around their waists while they took classes like ballet, tap, jazz and hip-hop. The devices recorded how much time the girls spent in motion and how brisk that motion was.

Failing The 30-Minute Exercise Goal

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend 30 minutes of exercise for students during each school day. They also encourage another 30 minutes of physical activity after school. Seven dance classes were tested in the study. None would have been challenging enough to meet the after-school portion of that goal.

Some dance classes missed the half-hour goal by more than others. For instance, kids ages 5 to 10 did only about six minutes of fast-paced movement during a 50-minute Spanish dance class. In ballet, students recorded 14 minutes of challenging physical activity per class. Jazz and partnered dance classes (like ballroom and swing dancing) kept students moving for about 22 minutes per class.

Hip-Hop Classes Get Best Score

Hip-hop classes came closest to meeting the CDC guidelines. They provided 27 minutes of significant physical activity per session.

Next, researchers broke down which classes provided the most activity in the same amount of time. They were not surprised to find that hip hop came out on top again. About 57 percent of each hip-hop class counted as meaningful exercise. Girls who spent the same amount of time practicing a Spanish dance called flamenco were only dancing full speed for about 14 percent of each class.

For dancers ages 11 to 18, results were not much different. Ballet scored highest with almost 17 minutes of challenging activity during a 55-minute class. Hip-hop was a close second with almost 16 minutes of hard work in each session. Flamenco came in last again with just four minutes of real exercise per class.

Teen Dancers Work Out Less Than Kids

Still, the teen dance classes all failed to meet the 30-minute goal. None of them required students to push themselves more than 31 percent of the time.

Researchers even found that the teenage group got less exercise than the 5- to 10-year-olds did. That was especially surprising since the older students were going to longer, more advanced classes.

The scientists tried to find an explanation for why older dancers would be dancing less than the kids group. They thought maybe teens were spending more time standing around in class while they learn more complicated routines. It's also possible that younger students moved around more while they were waiting for their turn to dance.

Team Sports Outdo Dance As A Healthy Workout

Overall, the study determined that dance classes delivered much less exercise than team sports. Researchers pointed out that there is a lot of standing around in both types of activities. However, sports require more intense activity in general.

For example, dancers wind up standing around for about 30 percent of each class. Soccer players do just as much standing around, but they also spend about 28 percent of each practice working up a sweat and giving it their all. Doctors say that is the type of exercise that is most effective at preventing children from becoming overweight. Dancers push it that hard only about 7 percent of the time.

Similar studies have found that between 50 percent and 100 percent of kids in sports programs meet the CDC's 30-minute exercise goal. Fewer than 10 percent of dancers in this study hit the same mark.

As the study's authors noted, that's a shame. Dance classes often attract girls who are not interested in sports, but they simply do not offer the same health benefits.

Quiz

- 1 Which answer choice BEST explains the significance of the research on dance conducted by San Diego State University?
- (A) Classes in hip-hop dancing offered more intense exercise than other dance classes.
 - (B) Younger kids actually got more exercise than teens even though their classes were shorter.
 - (C) Kids will not meet CDC exercise standards by participating in after-school dance classes.
 - (D) Girls are often more interested in dance classes than in sports activities.

- 2 Read the section "Teen Dancers Work Out Less Than Kids."
Select the paragraph that shows researchers' possible reasons for differences between younger kids and teens in classes.

- 3 Read the following sentence from the article.

The devices recorded how much time the girls spent in motion and how brisk that motion was.

What is the BEST meaning of the word "brisk" as it is used above?

- (A) sharp
 - (B) agile
 - (C) graceful
 - (D) energetic
- 4 Read the section "Team Sports Outdo Dance As A Healthy Workout."
Choose the phrase below that BEST defines the word "outdo" as it is used in the section title.
- (A) to do better
 - (B) to work harder
 - (C) to be more difficult
 - (D) to do more