



Belly Dancing for Fitness

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Saturday, May 31, 2008 8:30 AM–10:30 AM

Session Objective

The goal of this workshop is to provide an introduction to the ancient art of belly dancing and highlight the specific benefits of belly dancing movements for Spinning students and cyclists. Belly dancing is the oldest known dance form and can be done by anybody. It is designed for how a woman's body is made to move and doesn't require any training or background in dance. We will go through the basic movements in an easy-to-learn system that focuses on the arms and shoulders, ribcage and hips. The movements learn how to work with your body rather than the other way around, and we will learn all of the basic movements and put them together into a simple choreography. Hip scarves and shimmy belts will be provided to use during the workshop.

The History of Belly Dancing

Belly dancing is more properly known as Middle Eastern dance or *danse orientale* ("dance of the east"). The term belly dancing came from a poor English translation from the French phrase *danse du tronque*, which literally means "dance of the stomach." Belly dancing has been around for thousands of years and it is believed that the movements were used in ancient cultures to ease pains of labor and childbirth. It is also a way for females to assert their strength and power through movement. Although many different theories exist about the spread of belly dancing across the east and north into Europe, it was believed to have been carried into different areas by the gypsies. Today it is still very popular in Middle Eastern countries and northern Africa, where large lavish nightclubs with live musicians and professional dance troupes are common. Belly dancing has recently enjoyed growing popularity in the United States. It is easy to learn and many students who claim to have very little dance ability are pleasantly surprised at how their body responds to the movements.

Benefits of Belly Dancing for Spinning/Cycling

The primary muscles used in belly dance movements are small and large muscles in the hips (flexors, psoas, TFL), abdominals (transversus and rectus abdominus, obliques), lower back and shoulders. The flowing nature of belly dance movements means the muscles are both activated and stretched at the same time. Belly dance is a dance of isolation and control, which means that different planes of the body move independently of each other with controlled precision, preferring the use of smaller internal muscles over larger external ones (similar to Pilates exercises). Movements such as hip shimmies strengthen muscles and stimulate/release a great deal of energy from what is considered to be the "power center" of the female body. The muscles being gently used and stretched while belly dancing are the primary cycling muscles, and the dance movements provide a good counterbalance to the rigors of Spinning.

What Belly Dancing Is Not

- Harmful to the body
- "Stripping" or exotic dancing (it is traditionally performed by women, for women)
- Difficult to learn: there is no necessity for complex steps or choreographies

What Belly Dancing Is

- Empowering and relaxing
- Beneficial for cyclists (flexibility and movement integration)
- For everybody—regardless of age, body type and ability
- A lot of fun!

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