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Fitness pole dancing - the long and the short of it!



Traditionally an activity that few women would admit to doing, or even being interested in, pole dancing has broken away from its somewhat seedy image to become a major global fitness trend.

As a dance and fitness instructor with over seventeen years experience, I have sought out, studied and taught all sorts of fitness trends over the years and learned that every innovation introduces a new group of women to fitness. One of my career aims has been to make fitness fun, enjoyable and motivational, so I revel in new ideas like pole dancing which, for me, fills all of these criteria. Improving fitness and getting, or staying, in shape should never be boring - it should be an exciting and inspirational lifelong journey!

Widespread appeal

It's easy to see why pole dancing has caught on. It's great for self expression, relaxation and confidence building. In addition to the satisfaction of having a great workout, participants tend to leave, even after just one class, with increased confidence and self esteem, which is always good for retention levels!

Fitness pole dancing appeals to women from all walks of life and the great thing is that it caters for participants of all weights, shapes, heights and sizes - it really is for everyone. I have never had a client leave a pole dancing session not wanting to return. In fact, many participants have told me that they find themselves dreaming about pole dancing, and even looking at lampposts with a glint in their eye - it really can be that addictive!

A typical fitness pole dancing lesson is a combination of aerobic dance, strength training and flexibility. After a thorough warm up and pre-stretch, the lessons include basic spinning moves (not the indoor cycling variety!), poses, and dancing. Finally, the spins and choreography are put together to form a routine.

However, pole dancing is not for the faint-hearted. After the initial session,

your whole body may ache and be stiff. As a fitness instructor I am used to feeling my muscles ache, but after my first lesson I could hardly sit down or even hold up my hairdryer! But don't let this put you off; as with all fitness programs, your body soon adapts and in no time you will be spinning upside down and climbing the pole with ease.

Pole dancing moves can be as simple as a basic spin while holding on to the pole with both hands, or as complex as spinning around the pole upside down with one leg. You can take pole dancing to whatever extreme you like, keeping it simple or continually striving for new moves and combinations. Either way, it will still give your body a thorough workout.

It provides great cardiovascular exercise, and is also excellent for muscle building, body toning, flexibility, posture and increasing suppleness. As the moves become more complicated the body will be put into more demanding positions, some of which involve supporting your entire body weight on one arm or leg. Such activity results in great muscle definition and toning all over, especially in the arms, thighs, buttocks and abs.

Teaching fitness pole dancing

Any fitness instructor interested in teaching fitness pole dancing, should take lessons with as many different pole dancing teachers as possible. As with all fitness disciplines, each pole dancing instructor will have a different style and manner of teaching, so you'll be able to identify and interpret moves to fit your personality and instructing technique.

Of course, to really excel with the choreography you will need to install a pole at home or have regular access to one. To feel confident with the pole moves, I have spent hours practising spins and transition. If you are getting serious, it may even be worth visiting a table dancing club to watch professional pole dancers in action. It really is worth seeing because the dancers are so accomplished, but you will need to have an open mind as it is often performed topless or even nude in these venues!

I converted a room in my home into a small studio with two poles, mirrors and a wooden floor, and teach up to four girls in one session. I have taught hundreds of girls to dance and even have my own fitness pole dance troupe, made up of ten of my class members; I have never had such a positive reaction to a new fitness trend. The hour long session always flies by, and every participant books more classes. It is, by far, one of the most rewarding and fun types of exercise I have ever taught.



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Fitness pole dancing - the long and the short of it!

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Benefits of pole dancing

- Improved endurance, strength, power, stamina and mobility, particularly in abdominals and upper body areas. The impressive level of calorie burning and improved muscle tone is noted by all attendees.
- As it is a weight-bearing cardiovascular activity, pole dancing can help to increase bone density (thereby reducing Osteoporosis risk), reduce the risk of coronary disease, decrease blood pressure, and reduce body fat and lower cholesterol.
- The sensual elements of pole dancing promote psychological wellbeing, which improves self image and self confidence.
- Releases exercise-related endorphins, which make everyone feel good!
- Workouts don't feel like workouts due to the distinctive environment and novel teaching techniques.
- Classes offer a unique socialising environment and a perfect chance to make friends with like-minded people.
- Participants get a great workout, feel empowered and gain a real sense of achievement.

Pole dancing is becoming such a popular fitness trend throughout the world that Polestars Australia is currently working with the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra and the Academy of Sport, Physical Activity and Wellbeing in the UK, to determine exactly what health benefits can be gained from participation. ♦



Rachel Holmes

Based in the UK, Rachel is the creator of the Instructor dedicated web site www.choreographytogo.com which contains choreography downloads, business, marketing and PR ideas and a free weekly instructor newsletter. She recently launched her own fitness pole dancing web site www.fitnesspoledancing.com where you can download moves, lessons and e-books, and buy pole dancing equipment, and DVDs.



Australian-based information supplied by Stephanie Kite

Stephanie is the co-founder and managing director of Polestars Australia, this country's only nationwide pole dancing fitness school. Stephanie is also a Polestars instructor and former competitive gymnast. For more information about pole dancing in Australia visit www.polestars.com.au or phone 1300 735 581.