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## Don't Be a Square -- Dance!

### Do-Si-Do Fitness

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July 9, 2001 -- "Bow to your partner, bow to your corner, circle left, alemand left ... swing and promenade home."

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In squares of eight across the country, Americans from senior-citizen age on down are linking arms, sashaying, and "do-si-doing" themselves to longer, healthier, and happier lives. They're having a blast and also lowering their risk of [heart disease](#), [diabetes](#), certain types of [cancer](#), age-related memory loss, [osteoporosis](#), and depression.

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#### Good for Body and Mind

With all its moving, twisting, and turning, square dancing provides more than the daily dose of heart- and bone-healthy physical activity. Remembering all the calls -- from "do-si-do" to 'alemand' -- keeps the mind sharp, potentially staving off age-related memory loss, experts say. And the companionship that regular square dancing offers is an antidote to depression and loneliness, a statement confirmed by square-dancing advocates everywhere.

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Take Larry McKinley, a 62-year-old who has been square dancing for 30-plus years with his wife, Sue -- who, incidentally, he met at a square dance. "We do it as often as we can, maybe five or six times a week," he tells WebMD.

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"The listening -- and executing the commands -- takes deep concentration. The twisting and turning are not too hard on you, but give your body the exercise that it needs," he says.

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McKinley's club, the London Bridge Square Dance Club of Lake Havasu, Ariz., has 80 members, and the average age of a member is 75.

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"We recently graduated an 84-year-old," he says. "Graduated," in square-dancing terms, means the student has earned a Mainstream dance level.

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There are four levels of square dancing, McKinley tells WebMD. There's Mainstream, then there's Plus, followed by the more professional, exhibition-levels, A-1 and A-2. McKinley is a Plus-level square dancer.

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"It's very easy once you learn," he says. "Years ago, I was getting a divorce and didn't want to be a bump on a barstool." That's when he went to his first dance and got hooked.

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"It's just so much fun. Square dancing is setting friendship to music," he says. "It's having a place to get up and go in the evening where you can work up a good tired and a good sweat."

### 'If You Can Walk, You Can Square Dance'

McKinley knows what he's talking about. Square dancing contributes to a more healthy and independent lifestyle, says Lewis Maharam, MD, a sports medicine specialist in New York City and president of the Greater New York Regional Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine.

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"Anything that keeps you active will keep you healthier and feeling younger. In most cases if you can walk, you can square dance, but it's good advice to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise regimen," says Maharam, also medical director of the Suzuki Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in San Diego, the Country Music Marathon, and the New York City Marathon.

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