



Tango for Balance

TM

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FEAR OF FALLING?

Come along to
TANGO FOR BALANCE

at The Room – free introductory lesson – then fee negotiable -
helpers/carers welcome: 11.15 am-12.15
REFRESHMENTS

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT TANGO IS GOOD FOR PROBLEMS OF BALANCE. IT IS ALSO FUN, A WAY OF EXERCISING TO LOVELY MUSIC AND A WAY OF MEETING PEOPLE.

Especially rewarding for those with Parkinson's Disease. Expect a lot of individual attention. No need to come with a partner, however you may wish to do this with your carer. It's a good activity to share. **CARERS ARE WELCOME AND PAY NOTHING.**

Anthony/Fay will come and teach Tango for Balance at your local support group or association: price negotiable - or Anthony will come and give a class to your group – classes should not be too large – individual attention is crucial, and with larger numbers two teachers are necessary.



PERSONAL TANGO FOR BALANCE TRAINING

TANGO FOR BALANCE™

Recent research at Washington University School of Medicine, St Louis, Missouri, has posited that tango exercises may be an appropriate and effective strategy for ameliorating functional mobility deficits in people who are frail and elderly. This was specifically noted in sample groups of individuals with Parkinson's disease and randomly selected groups of elderly people. Those who participated in tango lessons showed improved balance over those who participated in standard exercise classes designed for the elderly and for people with PD.

Tango may be danced either in the embrace or in "the practise hold" - one partner holding the other by supporting the upper arms. Working in pairs like this increases balance security. Tango helps people who have difficulty walking in dual-task conditions, since the partners are concerned with executing a simple sequence in time to the music: the leader instigating and the partner following. In Tango for Balance classes, these roles are exchanged, encouraging both participants to think at the same time as they move. Tango also helps alleviate panic problems, freezing while turning and other gait troubles symptomatic of fear of falling down.



“Loss of functional mobility can lead to low self-esteem, poor mood, withdrawing from activities, and decreased quality of life.”(* 1) The social nature of partner dancing alleviates these effects. But it is not only the elderly who suffer from balance problems: it is a problem which may affect those injured in accidents, those with inner ear disorders, and many others, so Tango for Balance is not only for the elderly. It is for anyone who wishes to improve their ability to balance.



WHY TANGO?

Tango is exceptionally good for equilibrium – primarily because tango is essentially a walking dance in partnership. This means that, at the level relevant to Tango for Balance, two feet are on the floor at any one time. One is your own, one is your partner's. Essentially when one stands in the practise hold with a partner, four feet are sustaining stability rather than two – this is like using another person as a support frame. However, as classes progress, couples are encouraged to move together without using the partner for support.

Walking alone involves moving from one foot to another. There are three crucial events involved in this: instigation of the move forward, passage of one foot past the other – with pressure on one hip – and landing on the other foot – transferring pressure to the other hip. Tango encourages dancers not to “dip” in the hip when walking forwards. Allowing the hip to become displaced while transferring weight is a major cause of instability.

Three possibilities exist in moving from one foot to the other – or indeed in rebounding back to the initial foot. You can walk forwards, backwards or to the side. Tango works with all three of these movements, and with the simple transference of weight from one foot to another “on the spot”. In a conventional tango class, preliminary exercises will encourage participants to move through these actions without a partner, developing “an axis” – that is, an ability to balance collectedly (one foot without weight on it next to the foot with weight on it) after forward steps, back-steps, sidesteps or rebounds back onto the foot initiating the step. In Tango for Balance, such exercises may be done later, where appropriate, once a measure of balance security has been attained. Exercises may also be performed seated to encourage strength in knee and ankle.

The second essential component to tango is the pivot, a rotation of the ball of the foot achieved by releasing the heel. Fear of performing this action, or indeed the functional inability to perform it, leads to freezing in turns and is a key cause of falls. Participants in these balance workshops are assessed for pivot ability and, where capable of pivots, taught how to perform this action without losing their axis, or, where incapable, shown how to develop a strategy for turning without pivoting.

Partners are encouraged to exchange lead and follow roles, so that they learn how to instigate and how to respond to movement. They are also expected to swap partners, which creates a pleasant social ambiance – raising morale. And all these issues are addressed to the accompaniment of music, which stops them feeling like a chore.

While a vestigial unconditioned walking response can be observed in babies, we learn to walk, unlike other animals. We learn to walk as we learn to talk and to think. Walking is a conditioned activity

that requires a number of complex muscular co-ordinations. However, our ability to walk in a confident balanced way may be improved as we bring walking closer to its natural roots in the unconditioned response from which it evolved. Tango encourages crossover coordination between the upper right and the lower left parts of the body. Crossover coordination has implications for autism and Asperger's Syndrome, dyspraxia and dyslexia.

This was discovered by observing crawling patterns in babies. Freedland and Bertenthal have stated that "crawling experience, and specifically experience following the onset of hands-and-knees crawling, contributes to the development and reorganization of a number of other skills, such as spatial orientation, fear of heights, and postural stability." (*2)

Significantly, some infants later diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome have exhibited crawling patterns that deviate from the basic diagonally opposing limb patterns. Diagonal coupling of the limbs "maintains the most stable centre of gravity." (ibid)

By encouraging crossover coordination, tango develops our ability to maintain "the most stable centre of gravity" - for dancers are encouraged to coordinate crossover rib rotation with walking, thus maintaining a connection with their partner. For all these reasons, tango is good for a confident walk, with diminished fear of falling.

Tango for Memory

In addition, tango may well help dementia sufferers, since participants are encouraged to memorise short choreographic sequences known as "figures". This encourages stimulation of memory linked to physical action, which may be more effective than memory exercises which are simply done in the head.

Anthony Howell

References:

* 1) Effects of Tango on Functional Mobility in Parkinson's Disease: A Preliminary Study
Madeleine E. Hackney, BFA, Svetlana Kantorovich, BS, Rebecca Levin, DPT, and Gammon M. Earhart, PT, PhD

*2) Freedland, R. L. & Bertenthal, B. I. (1994) *Psychol. Sci.* 5, 26-32.



*A former dancer with the Royal Ballet, Anthony Howell is a Registered Exercise Professional and a qualified Extend teacher for the elderly. He was founder of The Theatre of Mistakes which performed at many venues including the Paris Biennale and the Galerie Farideh Cadot, as well as at the Theatre for the New City and the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York. His performances have been seen at the Tate, the Hayward Gallery and at the Sydney Biennale. His seminal textbook, *The Analysis of Performance Art*, is distributed by Routledge, and he is internationally regarded for his performance workshops. In 2001 he received a £6000 LADA bursary to study the tango in Buenos Aires. He now demonstrates the tango internationally and teaches at his studio *The Room*, in Tottenham Hale.*



Photos by John Swindell, taken at PD Society Open day, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, 1 September, 2008

“I want to share with other readers my positive experience of a new dance initiative for people with Parkinson's. I had been looking around for a way to combat my tendency to fall when a friend told me about Argentine tango. Recent research in America suggests that people with PD, especially those with balance problems, may benefit more from learning tango than attending the standard exercise class. I decided to give it a try and joined the first 'Tango for Balance' class in Britain. What I've found so far is that it's highly relevant to my problems. I'm practising how to walk forwards and backwards, turn, and initiate movement with a much more balanced and secure posture than I had before. Also, tango requires one to strengthen weak ankles and stretch shortened calf muscles (which are partly responsible for my falling). Above all else, it is exhilarating to move with a dance partner to beautiful music which, as we all know, is a great antidote to the effects of PD. It's early days but I'm very encouraged.”

Letter from Judith Ravenscroft submitted to *The Parkinson*



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overland or any bus to Tottenham)

www.the-room.org.uk

MAP ON WEBSITE

The Room

“four walls and floor”