

ZUMBA Your Way to Better Health

by Johanne Kieffer

http://www.capewomenonline.com/Issue_Spring2011/SPRING2011_Articles/Zumba.html

New Year's Day 2010. Once again, a time to renew. This would be the year I commit to exercising regularly.

As usual, life got in the way.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. My alarm kept going off at 5:30 a.m. I kept hitting the snooze button.

In September, a little blue booklet appeared in my mailbox unsolicited. It was a listing of community education classes. In a moment of exhaustion and self-disappointment, I flipped to the page marked "FITNESS AND HEALTH". Drawn to the words Zumba Fusion, I wondered, "What the heck is that?"

The description read: "Zumba Fusion workout is a Latin-inspired fitness program..." My eyes traveled quickly to "...with easy to follow dance steps..."

Dancing? I love to dance! I could do that! I had a brief "Jane Fonda Workout" flashback, including big hair and leg warmers!

Without hesitation I signed the form, wrote a check and added my name to the list. I was entering the new age of dancercise called Zumba. I had no clue what it meant, but I was excited about my commitment to finally exercise. Now I belonged to a class. I had to follow through.



Zumba essentials

I enter each session with my bag flung over my shoulder carrying my Zumba essentials: yoga mat, two-pound weights, dyna band and bottled water. Outfitted in an ensemble of sneakers, yoga pants, t-shirt and sweatshirt, I unload my pack of fitness tools and remove my jacket.

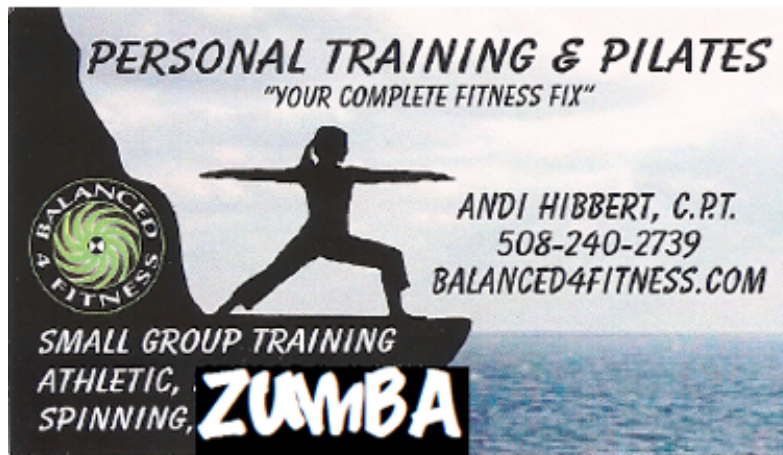
The sound of rhythmic drumming is vibrating through the room. It's some type of world music – my cue to take my place on the floor with the others. It's time to move.

I watch the instructor's feet like a hawk and follow her every move. She taps her toe, I follow. She jumps to the left, I follow. She shakes her hips, I follow. She calls out the move and counts down the repetitions. I don't have to think, just follow her lead.

The music picks up tempo and pulses through my veins. My body takes over as my mind enters the realm of moving meditation. A rush of warmth flows through my being and perspiration beads on my neck and chest. I peel off my sweatshirt and toss it to the side, still moving in sync with the beat of the sounds echoing in my ears.

My trance is broken when I hear, "Get some water if you need it and grab your weights". I power walk to the sidelines and take a couple of swallows of my spring water, trying to replenish what was evaporating through my skin. I grab my two-pound weights and resume my place back on the floor.

There is a change in pace. I hear a familiar beat. "Tonight I'm gonna party likes it's 1999..." We're moving in unison to Prince. With weights in hand we continue to move, working different muscles all the time; curls, pull downs, punches and kicks, every class is different.



Moving on to squats, I feel my quad muscles screaming, "I'm out of shape!" I hear the instructor counting down, "...and four, three, two, one... now pulse it for ten, nine, eight..." Struggling to get to just one more squat, I think, "That's it. I can't make it." Then I hear, "You can do it! Two more, one more... now tap it out."

I exhale. I made it!



Johanne (far right) dancing her way to better health

The music slows and I drag myself over to get my mat. It's time for belly work and yoga stretches. This is always the best part of the workout for me. At this point, I'm drenched in sweat and have earned my stretch time. It always feels good to finally rest in one place after moving and grooving for almost an hour straight.

As the session ends, we do some neck rolls and deep breathing. We're done. Everyone claps with thanks for a great workout.

I began Zumba in October 2010, attending two classes a week. By the end of November, I found it easier to balance during my workout. My legs were noticeably stronger. By January, I was standing straighter, sitting taller. Then I realized my abs were stronger. Who knew you could have strong abs after fifty?

I sleep better now and my blood pressure is lower. The blood is flowing to my brain and I feel more positive. My clothes even fit better. The days of Jane Fonda are long gone. My perspective has shifted from body beautiful to body functional. From muscle bound to muscle tone, flexibility, and bone density.

My view has shifted from the social mask to internal health. It seems to be a natural path as we age to move into this well-being place. The place within where the mind and body connect.

The wisdom place of balance.

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