



GLOBE

healthreport

WARNING:

DANCING CAN DAMAGE YOU!

HIT TV shows *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance* are inspiring folks of all ages to hotfoot their way to health.

But experts are warning that while dancing is great for young and old alike, it could do you more harm than good if you don't take precautions.

Already this season there have been injuries on *Dancing with the Stars*.

Former U.S. House of Representatives Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay, 62, was forced to quit the show after suffering stress fractures in both feet.

And *Entourage* star Debi Mazar, 45, landed in the hospital after tearing a muscle in her neck.

Even pro dancer Lacey Schwimmer, 21, was feeling the pain after severely straining the hip flexors and abductor muscles in her upper legs around the groin area. She needed physical therapy for at least three weeks.

"I'm doing OK," she says. "I'm in a lot of pain but hey, that's a dancer's life!"

Dance-related injuries are on the rise across the country and most can be prevented, says Dr. Bal Rajagopalan, a Beverly Hills orthopedic surgeon.

"The problem with *Dancing with the Stars* is that the contestants become overachievers," he says. "They vie for the prize and don't take the time to prepare their bodies properly."



Tom DeLay uses an ice pack to ease his foot pain after competing with Cheryl Burke (inset)

Steps you must take to avoid ballroom injuries

"Dancing is a very demanding sport that pushes the body way beyond the normal movement we experience in our daily lives."

Dr. Raj says that too often, folks throw themselves onto dance floors, trying to copy what they see on TV. It's vital, he says to take care before hitting the ballroom. To reduce the risk of injury, take the following steps:

1. Always stretch the body totally before and after dancing. This will help the muscles and tendons get back to normal after being pulled and pushed.

2. Wear proper shoes with arch support to help avoid fractures. "You put so much weight on your heel and toes during a fast dance move that it's easy to overload the bones," says Dr. Raj.

3. Check with a professional therapist before beginning an intense dance program to see if you're in good enough condition for the stress and strain of demanding dance routines. "Very often we have imbalance in our front and back legs which can lead to serious knee and ankle injuries," says Dr. Raj. "You can help prevent future injury by strengthening the muscles around these joints."

4. Drink a glass of milk daily to help maintain bone density and strength.

5. Finally, choose an age-appropriate dance. "Our tendons and muscles deteriorate as we age," says Dr. Raj. "If you are over 40, you may want to concentrate on learning how to waltz rather than quick step!"

- LYNN ALLISON
lynnallison@globef.com

Update

Natural way to beat hypertension

+WHOLE grain food can help fight high blood pressure, says a new report. Folks who ate lots of oatmeal, rye, cracked wheat, brown rice and natural popcorn were 19 percent less likely to get hypertension, found Harvard researchers. Unlike grains that have been refined, whole grains retain their bran and germ, so they are packed with natural goodness. Experts recommend 3 ounces of whole grains daily for maximum benefit.

Folic acid fights hearing loss

+A NEW study has found that folic acid staves off age-related hearing loss. Folks with high folate intake from foods and supplements were 20 percent less likely to have hearing problems, reports Boston-based ear, nose and throat expert Josef Shargorodsky, who studied 3,559 people older than age 60. Folate is found in foods such as green leafy vegetables, lentils and chickpeas, while folic acid is the synthetic form found in supplements.

Boost confidence by sitting upright

+STRAIGHT up! Here's a great way to boost your self-esteem...sitting upright not only benefits your back, it also improves the way you feel about yourself. A team from Ohio State University found that folks with a good posture were more confident than those who slouched. Researchers came to the conclusion after comparing the confidence levels of people who sat up straight at a desk with those who slumped.