

# Swing Dancing

## Uplifting Music, Great Exercise!

By: Deborah Liv Johnson



Dancing is one of the most satisfying forms of expression — a marriage of movement and music, both scripted and improvised. Young children introduced to music and rhythm are often compelled to move, simply because they are responding to how the music and beat make them feel. There is an exhilaration and freedom that comes with dancing, and one of the greatest examples of this freedom grew out of jazz and jazz-inspired music during the 1920s and 30s.

One of the most famous dances of the swing era was an energetic, African-American inspired dance called the Lindy Hop. Originating in Harlem, the Lindy was a fusion of dances like the breakaway, the Charleston, the Texas Tommy and the hop. But the dance moves were as varied as the neighborhoods in which the dancers lived, influencing Lindy enthusiasts to create new moves like side flips, aerials and over the back throws. The sky was the limit as far as Lindy dancers were concerned, and their gymnastic-like moves rocked clubs and dance houses across the country.

Swing dance jargon and the names of dances vary, depending on location. Some of the more common names are: East Coast Swing; Shag (the Carolinas); Whip or Push (Texas); DC Hand Dance (Washington, D.C.); and West Coast Swing, the official dance of California.

### Swing Dancing Today

Swing dancing is alive and well throughout the United States and countries around the world.

If you're new to the dance world, consider taking dance lessons. Many dance clubs provide weekly opportunities to dance for both members and guests with fees ranging from \$5 to \$10. Lessons, group and individual, are also available.

If you're a veteran dancer, invite your friends to join you for swing dance outings and plan weekly or bi-weekly dance nights.

### Local Dance News

Local dance opportunities abound in the Coachella Valley, including the [Desert Swing Dance Club](#) and [Palm Springs Dancers](#). Each group has a Web site with information about weekly and holiday-themed dances. [KKCalifornia.com](#) lists local dancing organizations and upcoming events. Some organizations offer complimentary group lessons prior to the evening's dance time, and there are listings for private dance lessons as well.

Ann McGowan, president of the Desert Swing Dance Club which focuses on West Coast Swing, first started dancing as an outlet from her duties as a caregiver for her father who had Alzheimer's. "Dancing is a great way to meet people and to stay connected," says McGowan. "You really listen to the music and get involved with it. You have to pay attention to your dance partner and to the dance signals. West Coast Swing is challenging, both physically and intellectually, stimulating your mind and body."

McGowan says dancing is great exercise and a healthy way to stay active. "It's just been a Godsend to me," she explains. "Not only have I met extraordinarily good friends but it has really helped my physicality. It's great physical therapy for balance and aging issues."

### Dance at Home

For the times when you aren't able to attend a dance club, practice your moves in the comfort of your home. If you tossed out your favorite swing music records, or if you never owned any in the first place, the Internet has a wealth of music from which to choose. Clear an adequate space in your living room or other area — wooden floors are best — and move, move, move! Stay hydrated, wear comfortable clothes and shoes, and stretch your muscles when you're finished. Most of all, remember to enjoy yourself!