



# Should I Try... Zumba?

An insider's guide to the dance workout that blasts calories and keeps things fun.

By **MAGGIE PUNIEWSKA**

**IN THE MID-'90S, ZUMBA** was just a few people salsa-ing in a tiny studio in South America. Flash forward and this Latin fitness craze is everywhere—as big in hip Hollywood health clubs (Jennifer Lopez is a fan) as it is at the local Y. Zumba's real draw—besides the huge calorie burn, but we'll get to that—is that it feels more like a party than a gym session. "It's exercise in disguise: You don't realize you're doing cardio, lunges or shoulder presses," says Kass Martin, a Zumba education specialist. Is it the answer to your fitness prayers? We'll let you be the judge.

### What's a class like?

→ In a word: *rocking*. You'll dance a different routine to each of 9 to 12 songs, moving

to a mix of Latin rhythms (salsa and merengue), as well as hip-hop, Bollywood, country and disco. Each 45- to 60-minute session includes a warm-up and cooldown; some classes incorporate squats and jumps. Bottom line: You won't be bored.

### Do I need to be in great shape to keep up?

→ No need to be a gym rat or have moves like J.Lo, stresses Jessica Matthews, MS, exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise: "Research shows that fit and less-fit people can get an equally good workout doing Zumba." Expect to see both types, says Martin: "I have students with two left feet and some who dance professionally. It's more about moving than getting

the dance down." While you may feel klutzy at first, you will get better, insists Michelle DeGennaro of Warwick, N.Y., who credits Zumba with helping her shed 102 pounds: "When I started I was worried about coordination, but after three classes I felt comfortable."

### So what kind of body benefits will I get?

→ You'll burn off fat: This workout can erase almost 600 calories per hour. "You're constantly switching between high and low intensities, so it's a great interval workout," explains John Porcari, PhD, program director of the Clinical Exercise Physiology program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Doing the moves also tones your whole body and improves endurance.

### Honestly, is it an injury waiting to happen?

→ Depending on the class, Zumba can be low-impact. And in general, starting out slow can go a long way toward staving off injuries such as muscle strain, says Matthews.

### How can I find a teacher who is a good fit?

→ Try a few classes before buying in bulk. Make sure the teacher is a licensed Zumba instructor (check [zumba.com](http://zumba.com)). Prices range from \$5 to \$25 per class.

## THE ONLY GEAR YOU'LL NEED

It's—drumroll, please—the right pair of sneakers. While dance-fitness shoes are ideal, cross-trainers, which are flexible like dance kicks and sit fairly low to the ground, will do the trick. Avoid trying to Zumba in running or trail shoes, though, because their treads can make you "stick" to the floor, slowing you down and setting you up for injuries, advises exercise physiologist Jessica Matthews, MS. Here, five Zumba-friendly pairs.

- 1 **Asics Gel-Rhythmic 2**, \$65; [asicsamerica.com](http://asicsamerica.com).
- 2 **Zumba Z-Kickz Original**, \$75; [zumba.com](http://zumba.com).
- 3 **Rykä Exertion**, \$75; [ryka.com](http://ryka.com).
- 4 **Bloch Lightening**, \$65; [zappos.com](http://zappos.com).
- 5 **Adidas Iriya II**, \$90; [adidas.com](http://adidas.com).



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