

# Get out your dancing shoes and get serious about losing weight

GET FIT • CHRISTINE FACCIOLO • December 7, 2010

Like most people, Priscilla Dahlen knows the benefits of staying fit but couldn't seem to find an activity she could stick with. A broken ankle took her off the tennis court 20 years ago. Swimming became little more than a relaxing summer pastime. And forget about aerobics classes.

Still, she couldn't ignore the 70 pounds she'd put on over the years, which affected the way she looked and felt. "I was tired and I noticed that as I grew older I was having more difficulty doing things and moving," said Dahlen, 70, of Chadds Ford, Pa.

She knew she needed to lose the weight but wasn't particularly motivated until two years ago when she discovered she'd dropped 5 pounds at the end of the swim season. Her big breakthrough, however, came when she accompanied her daughter to a dance club in New York City. That event reignited a past interest in dancing.

"I thought this might be something I'd stick with because I wanted to learn to dance the way the kids are dancing now," she said.

Dahlen didn't find a place to learn the "funky" dance styles of today, but she did discover the BlueBallRoom in Wilmington and started taking ballroom classes regularly.

Today, she's 60 pounds lighter, and just 10 pounds shy of her weight in college. Moreover, she's gotten into strength training to get her muscles ready for the dance competitions she plans to enter. And she's full of energy again.

"I'm moving like I've never moved in years," she said. "I found this wonderful thing in my old age. It's wonderful for keeping me fit, for my mind and for the way I feel."

**How did you decide that fitness needed to be a bigger part of your life?**

I've always tried to stay reasonably fit and active. I played tennis until a broken ankle intervened, have enjoyed walking most of my life, took aerobic exercise classes. So I've always seen the need but have had varying degrees of success in sticking with it. I had gradually put on pounds over the years until I was considerably overweight -- about 60 to 70 pounds worth of excess -- and didn't really like the way my body looked, or how difficult it was for me to get up from a chair or stoop to pick up something. I felt my muscles disappearing and flab taking over. I knew I needed some activity that would help me lose weight.

## What was your biggest challenge in starting a fitness plan?

Planning never really worked for me. I tried plans, but there's just something that causes me to rebel when I don't want to follow the plan. The plan itself becomes some kind of obstacle that seems to get in the way of what I really want to do. It's almost like the plan takes on an identity of its own and I end up trying to wrest control from the plan. Gotta be some kind of psychological hang-up there. So, my biggest challenge in getting fit was probably finding some activity that was not a plan, but that was strenuous enough and enjoyable enough so that I didn't see it as some chore and really, really wanted to do it.

## What motivates you to stay fit?

I have lost 60-plus pounds over the last two years of ballroom dancing. Although there are classes at the BlueBallRoom in salsa, swing, hustle, etc., I

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became interested in the more traditional styles of Latin (cha-cha, rumba), jive and in the classical waltz, tango, quickstep, etc., found in both the American Smooth and the International Standard genres. Although someone wanting to learn ballroom dance can certainly have a very good experience by taking classes, I decided I wanted to do more, so began working with a private instructor to build skills more quickly. This led to my first Showcase experience, offered by the BlueBallRoom as a sort of student recital, and from that experience to participation this year in professional/amateur ballroom dance competitions. At this point, I love dancing, competing, performing and I am tremendously motivated to stay fit so I can look and do my best when participating in these activities and when practicing with and dancing for my instructors.

### What is your regular fitness routine?

I dance with an instructor three times a week at the BlueBallRoom. I practice dance routines and technical moves at home for at least an hour nearly every day. I don't have a regular schedule for my practicing. I just want to practice and get better and please myself and my instructors, so I find the time to work on my dancing.

### What role does nutrition play in your fitness?

I've always been a healthy eater -- I understand the value of vegetables, fruits and salads as a part of nutrition -- so I have no specific plan. I just eat like I always have from the time I was growing up on a farm in southern Arkansas -- walking home from school at noon for a big family home-cooked meal with fresh-from- the-garden vegetables, etc.

### What advice would you give someone who wants to get fit but is hesitant about getting started?

If a person can get as lucky as I have been and find an activity that challenges their mind as well as their body, that lifts their spirits, that gives them uncommon pleasure -- then they should pursue that activity to the fullest extent possible. Don't hold back. Just go for it -- all out.

**Have a fitness story to share? Contact Christine Facciolo at [getfit3@verizon.net](mailto:getfit3@verizon.net).**



Priscilla Dahlen dances with instructor Emanuele Pappacena at the BlueBallRoom Dance Studio. Dahlen, 70, of Chadds Ford, Pa., has lost 60 pounds since beginning regular dance instruction. (The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER)

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