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Get fit with Zumba, a blend of Latin dance and aerobics moves

BY HEATHER NEWMAN • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • MAY 16, 2008

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You feel it in the pit of your stomach first: a thumping Latin beat that makes your insides shake and your heel start tapping.



But by the end of the hour, you feel Zumba everywhere: your heaving lungs, your pulsing stomach muscles, your swinging shoulders.

"It truly feels like you're dancing with your friends," said Lori Fera, 24, of Farmington Hills. She loves Zumba classes so much she's training to be an instructor. "Everyone's laughing and talking

and having a good time. I started going to it and got addicted."

Zumba is a hot fusion of Latin dance and floor aerobics, and it's hitting fitness clubs and YMCAs and recreation centers all over metro Detroit. Invented in Colombia in the 1990s when aerobics instructor Beto Perez forgot his music and had to use the salsa tapes he had in his car, Zumba invaded the United States in 1999. It's not quite a dance class, not quite aerobics, but something very fast-paced and hip-heavy in between.

The moves are Latin-inspired, sometimes downright sexy and fun to do and watch.

"The Zumba class is like exercise plus having fun," said 45-year-old Eleanor Trice of Garden City, who started taking Zumba in January as something to do with her two sisters. They've stuck with it ever since. "I



ANDRE J. JACKSON/DFP

Lori Fera, 24, of Farmington Hills shadow boxes during a Zumba class. She loves Zumba so much she's training to be an instructor. "I started going to it and got addicted," she said.



ANDRE J. JACKSON/DFP

Debbie Lim teaches a new dance during a Zumba class last month at the Jon Grant Community Center in Farmington Hills. The 46-year-old Farmington Hills resident admits it took time to warm up to Zumba: "I didn't like it at first," but "you get used to the Latin music."

love it. You sweat. It's a very good workout."

The energy is super-high," said Christina Brown, 25, of Farmington Hills. "Everybody has a really great time and enjoys themselves, even if they don't know the steps."

In practice, Zumba is like an interval workout, said instructor Debbie Lim: You alternate high impact with low, and the enforced breaks of a couple of seconds between songs give people a chance to rest briefly.

Steven Keteyian, program director of preventive cardiology at Henry Ford Hospital, said the classes are appropriate for men younger than 40-45 and women younger than 50-55 who don't have any health risks.

If you're older, or have preexisting conditions -- back pain, osteoarthritis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, [diabetes](#), history of stroke or heart disease -- you know the drill. Check with your doctor first.

"People tend to know what things bother them or not," Keteyian said. "The class is for people looking for a better workout. It's a lot different than an easy-moving water aerobics class, or getting started walking."

Participants agree: Zumba is a killer workout. But they say it's not like a straightforward, hard-core high-impact aerobics or kickboxing class.

"It doesn't feel like you're working out," Fera said. She buys steel for an auto supplier. "Everyone at my day job makes fun of me because I'm always cha-chaing around. I feel really good, and I have a lot more energy. There's days when I come in from a very stressful workweek and right when the music hits, it melts away. You can't not have a good time."

She's always been an active person, but her opportunities to move around dried up after she left college two years ago, she said. So she'd been on the hunt for something new to do to keep fit.

"On my own, I was trying to work out. But it's hard to stay motivated," she said. "I truly do love going to these classes. Once you go to three classes, you get the steps down. I get really into it and exaggerate the moves and I am just sweating. It's a good workout for your core -- with the Latin moves, you're really using your hips. At the end of 45 minutes, I am ready for bed."

Although it has taken a while to make its way to Michigan, Zumba is one of the hottest trends in new aerobic classes this year. That may be one of the classes' only down sides, said Lim. The 46-year-old from Farmington Hills has been teaching Zumba for about 16 months.

"The only downfall to Zumba is that anyone can take the workshop and anyone can teach Zumba," she said. She expects that to change, and to see more requirements for people who want to be certified.

"Zumba was new to me," Lim recalled. "I was getting bored of the same



ANDRE J. JACKSON/DFP

Christina Welsh, 24, of Highland Township, helps lead a salsa-style dance during a Zumba fitness class.



ANDRE J. JACKSON/DFP

Eleanor Trice, 45, of Garden City started taking Zumba in January as something to do with her sisters. "It's a very good workout," she said.

GET MOVING TO THE MUSIC

Want to find out more about Zumba? Start here:

Read about Zumba or order DVDs. The official Zumba site at www.zumba.com lets you do both.

Attend a local class. The national Zumba site lists dozens in the area (click on "Find a Class").

Local instructor Debbie Lim offers a Web site that will hook you up with classes in your part of metro Detroit. (Visit www.zumbaofmichigan.com.)

Zumba Mazing (www.zumbami.com) offers classes by both male and female instructors in several cities.

Some upcoming classes

- Dearborn Bally Total Fitness, 18900 Michigan Ave., Dearborn; 6-7 p.m. Fridays (ongoing); \$10; 313-583-0034.

- Grosse Pointe Dance Center, 20945 Mack, Grosse Pointe Woods; 9-10 a.m. Mondays through June 2; \$12; 586-202-8108

- Core Fitness, 17235 Middlebelt Road, Livonia; 7:30-8:30 p.m. Mondays through May 26; \$12; 734-458-9445.

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routines. I had to concentrate, to learn new routines, new songs. It brought back a lot of my inspiration. I'm happier now."

That doesn't mean she liked it when she first tried it, however. Lim's first exposure to the new fitness routine was when she had an instructor on as a guest on her local-access cable TV show, "Fitness Motivators," carried on Bright House Networks cable.

"I said 'Oh, my god, I feel stupid doing this,' " Lim said, laughing. In her role as an instructor, Zumba was a whole new dance: For starters, instead of one continuous soundtrack, she had to compose routines to individual tracks, keeping with the classes' dance-party feel. "It was extremely difficult for me to get used to it. I didn't like it at first. It was intense. But then I got to know it. You get used to the Latin music."

Contact **HEATHER NEWMAN** at 313-223-3336 or hnewman@freepress.com.

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