

# Square dancing makes you smarter and healthier

SUBMITTED BY ANNE FENN LANGDON, OCEAN WAVES SQUARE DANCE CLUB

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SQUARE DANCING in Courtenay with Ocean Waves caller Fran and Roger Archambault is a lot of fun! A recent dance with caller Fran (centre) ended with lots of laughter and a group hug. The Ocean Waves Club has been dancing in the Comox Valley for over 40 years. Come to the Open House 10 am - Sun. Aug. 31st at the Florence Filberg Centre. Classes start Monday Sept. 08 7 pm at St. John the Divine Church hall 579 5th St. Courtenay. FMI call Anne 897-1657

In groups of eight - up and down the island - people are linking arms, sashaying & dancing their way to longer, healthier and happier lives. They are also lowering their risk of heart disease, diabetes, age-related memory loss and depression - and they're having a blast!

Often called "friendship set to music" West Coast dancing is one of the best activities you can be involved in. With all the moving, twisting and turning square dancing provides more than the daily dose of heart and bone-healthy physical activity. Listening and concentrating on the calls, executing the moves and interacting with other dancers is an antidote to depression and loneliness. And it's more fun than going to the gym!

For years dancing has been applauded for benefits as a physical exercise. Research shows further benefits such as stress reduction, increased serotonin levels and a sense of well-being. More recently studies have shown a further, even more interesting benefit -frequent dancing apparently makes us smarter!

A major 21 year study led by the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City with a focus on whether physical or cognitive recreational activities influenced mental acuity. They studied such activities as reading, writing, crossword puzzles, playing cards and playing musical instruments. They also studied physical activities like tennis or golf, swimming, cycling, dancing and walking.

Dancing came out near the top as an activity that assists in rewiring our neural pathways and thereby helping our mental acuity. Dancing integrates several brain functions at once - kinesthetic, rational,

musical and emotional. And square dancers experience all of this and more!

Dancers walk between 4 and 8 kilometers in a typical evening of dancing, burning calories with every step. Dancing continuously for 10 - 15 minutes at a time improves cardiovascular conditioning.

And then there's the fun part, hugs, laughter, sharing and companionship with others in a positive setting. Breaks in between dances allow dancers to socialize and share with others from diverse backgrounds, but with a common interest. This gives an opportunity to meet new people and develop strong social ties which contribute to self-esteem and a positive outlook. The energy put into dancing has an effect on the heart rate, blood pressure, rate of calorie burn and cholesterol profile.

In a relaxed setting with popular music, West Coast square dancing has been called the perfect exercise. It combines all the positive aspects of intense physical activity with none of the negative elements. It's a good aerobic exercise without the treadmill, and when you are not moving, you are clapping hands, tapping feet and concentrating on the callers directions. Never a dull moment - and more to come!

And the good news?? If you can walk, you can probably learn to West Coast dance. It takes time and practice, but you will have fun even while learning the first basic moves. You will also be impressed with how quickly you learn the moves and the fact that whatever you were worrying about when you came to the dance has now completely left your mind!

What's this all about and how can you get involved? The Ocean Waves Club in Courtenay starts fall classes Monday, Sept. 8 from 7- 9 pm at St. John the Divine Anglican Church Hall on 5th Street. Caller couple Fran and Roger Archambault make it fun from the beginning night. Fran has a wide range of music that makes your feet start moving.. The first two Monday classes are free, dress is very casual and everyone is welcome. For more details call Cathy or Guy at 250 338-7942. Check our website at [comoxvalleyoceanwaves.ca](http://comoxvalleyoceanwaves.ca).

The Ocean Waves have regular dances every 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month. On alternate weeks there are dances at 6 other clubs from Campbell River to Nanaimo, Powell River and Saltspring Island. On the southern part of the island 9 clubs encourage visitors to a variety of special dance nights, and even some weekend-long events in the summer. Come on out - you will glad you did & you will, of course, be much smarter!

- See more at: <http://www.comoxvalleyecho.com/news/lifestyles/square-dancing-makes-you-smarter-and-healthier-1.1338410#sthash.qMbuCugB.dpuf>