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MEDIA RELEASE

Bust a move with Zumba – just don't bust a knee joint

As people of all ages and abilities join the Zumba dance craze, NSW Chiropractors are urging those new to the popular Latin-American inspired fitness classes to avoid sprains and strains while they shimmy and shake.

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (NSW) today released a set of guidelines for people looking to take up Zumba as a way to get fit, lose weight and have fun after reporting an increased number of dance-class related injuries.

Chiropractors are reporting an increased number of patients with Zumba-related injuries including hip, knee and ankle joint pain, muscle soreness across the shoulders, tightness in the calves and hamstrings, and lower back discomfort.

Chiropractor and President of the CAANSW, Dr Kerein Earney, said at a time when obesity was such a concern it was great to see the Zumba fitness program getting people up and moving, but urged participants to play it safe.

"The large class sizes and less structured format means participants are giving it a go without individual guidance and may not realise they have been performing a move incorrectly until they wake up with a sore back, shoulder or knee the next day," Dr Earney said.

"Studies have found that overuse injuries, often related to training errors, inappropriate footwear, poor floor surface and biomechanical factors, are by far the most common injuries in aerobic dance enthusiastsⁱ.

"Zumba is fun, fast-paced and energetic, which is great to get the heart pumping, but does increase the risk of sprains and strains, so people should still keep in mind their current fitness levels and any pre-existing injuries.

"Research shows that a history of existing problems and a lack of involvement in other fitness activities results in higher injury ratesⁱⁱ, which is why it is important to speak to a health professional before starting any new exercise routine.

"Zumba classes are popping up all over, even in clubs and pubs, and because people are dancing to modern music away from the gym environment, there is a tendency to get carried away and push the body beyond its limitations. And certainly you should never mix exercise and alcohol."

Chiropractor John Petrozzi said he had recently treated three Zumba instructors and a number of participants in his Leichhardt clinic with injuries ranging from hip pain through to whiplash.

"Often these injuries don't cause pain straight away so people push through the high-intensity class and then experience significant inflammation and tenderness a few days later.

"My advice is don't be shy – go and talk to the instructor before or after the class to discuss any existing injuries, get some individual coaching on technique and clarify the steps."

Kogarah Chiropractor Prue Illidge is a Zumba participant and said that there isn't a lot of warm up in Zumba so recommends her patients take it upon themselves to walk, ride a bike or do some active stretching before the class to minimise injuries.

"It's also important that people try and maintain good spinal alignment throughout the class, with head up, shoulders down and back, chest up and abdominals and buttock muscles switched on.

"I recommend 'cross-training' shoes that will provide enough cushioning and support, and also suggest people mix up their exercise regime to include other classes, for example yoga or Pilates."

Chiropractors agree that, provided participants take the necessary precautions, Zumba is great for the spine as it encourages rhythmic rotation, lateral flexion and abdominal contraction which strengthens the supportive core muscles and mobilises the joints.

Zumba Guidelines - Chiropractors' Association of Australia (NSW)

1. Have any pre-existing injuries and general fitness levels checked out by a qualified professional before starting Zumba classes.
2. Keep up regular visits to your Chiropractor while you are doing Zumba so they can pay special attention to injury hot spots.
3. Select the correct Zumba session for you – Zumba Gold is a fun and friendly class specially designed for baby boomers; Zumbatomic is for kids aged 4 to 12; and Aqua Zumba is ideal for those requiring a low intensity workout.
4. Do your research and choose a class that is run in a controlled gym environment with fewer participants so you will have more personalised instruction.
5. As with any new exercise your body needs to get used to it, so start out slowly and build up strength over the first few lessons.
6. While you listen to the Latin beats, don't forget to listen to your body and stop immediately if you experience any discomfort.
7. Even if the session doesn't include a warm up and cool down routine, take it upon yourself to do some active stretching before and after the class to decrease muscle soreness.
8. Don't be afraid to ask for advice from the instructor to ensure you are performing a move correctly or if you need to adjust the routine to take into consideration any injuries or sore spots.
9. Stay hydrated before, during and after a Zumba workout as dehydration can lead to loss of concentration and co-ordination.
10. Always wear good, supportive footwear to reduce the risk of ankle and knee injuries.

MEDIA CONTACT: Michelle Newman 0412 044 471 mnewman@macpr.com.au

ⁱ Injuries associated with aerobic dance, Belt CR, Am J Sports Med. 1986 Jan-Feb;14(1):67-72.

ⁱⁱ The epidemiology of aerobic dance injuries, Garrick JG, Gillien DM, Whiteside P. Med Sci Sports Exerc. 1998 Aug;30(8):1246-9.