

PART ONE

# Belly Dance fitness Technique



## OVERVIEW

## Understanding belly dance movement

- ☺ The gentle, symmetrical, rhythmic undulations that we practice in Belly dance can help to revitalize almost every part of the body.
- ☺ Belly dance movements coax the joints into moving. Belly dance movements manipulate the joints gently and softly, using a pleasant circular or spiral motion, the scope of which can be controlled and regulated by each individual to take care of her own body.
- ☺ Belly dance is a low-impact form of exercise. In belly dance, one or both feet are always in contact with the floor.
- ☺ Most Belly dance movements are considerate of the knees. In belly dance the knees are typically held 'softly straight' which allows for easier, more comfortable movement in the ankle, knee and hip joints. 'Softly straight' knees are less demanding on the sacroiliac joint and lumbar joints.
- ☺ Many belly dance steps can be performed on demi-pointe (heels lifted) which will develop strong and shapely calf muscles and build strong arches in the feet.
- ☺ Belly dance movements feature the muscles of the abdomen, trunk, hips, and thighs. Your hips will be raised, lowered, twisted, tilted, pulsed, vibrated, and undulated!

Belly Dance movements will strengthen the abdominal muscles and improve posture. The tone of this muscle group contributes to the development of the belly dancer's strong supportive natural 'girdle' of postural support. The rectus abdominus, the internal and external obliques, and the transverse abdominus are considered to be the more superficial abdominal muscles. Of these, transverse abdominus is the deepest.

In its natural toned state, the rectus abdominus has a slightly rounded appearance. This means that a healthy abdomen should not appear flat or pinched in. A toned rectus abdominus displays healthy 'definition.' Psoas and iliacus, or iliopsoas, as they are commonly and collectively referred to, lie much deeper within the body.



The psoas connects the trunk to the leg. The psoas originates from the bodies and transverse processes of L1-L5 (lumbar region). There are a right-sided psoas and a left-sided psoas. Both sides cross the anterior pelvis, and insert on the lesser trochanter of the right and left femurs. The psoas is the primary hip flexor. When the spine is fixed in place, the psoas will move the leg toward the body. When the leg is fixed in place, the psoas will move the spine toward the leg. In both cases, the action involves a narrowing or closing of the angle of the hip, which is called Hip Flexion.



The iliacus originates from the entire internal iliac fossa. The iliacus' inferior fibers merge with those of the psoas and share the same insertion on the lesser trochanter of the femur. When the femur is fixed in space, iliacus pulls the pelvis into anterior tilt.

- ⊗ If the iliacus is habitually tight, short, or weak, the pelvis will tend to remain in anterior-tilt.
- ⊗ Similarly, if the psoas is habitually tight, short, or weak, the lumbar spine will tend to be shortened, compressed, or overly arched.
- ⊗ The combination of both problems will likely result in back pain.

### **Proper alignment requires a Neutral Pelvis**

We must learn to avoid letting the pelvis slip or shift into anterior pelvic tilt as we practice belly dance hip movements. During the basic hip-lift or hip-drop movements, many students are unaware that they have shortened the lumbar spine and allowed the pelvis to shift into an anterior-tilt. They get so interested in the up and down movement of the hips that they forget to monitor and maintain a relatively neutral pelvis. In other words, the student must learn to perform the up and down movements of the hip(s) while simultaneously minimizing (not allowing any extreme or noticeable) forward or backward displacement of the pelvis.

#### Poor pelvic placement affects body posture

In this photo, the pelvis displays anterior tilt. The lower back has too much arch and the buttocks are displaced too far back.

Often, an anterior tilted pelvis tends to coincide with a bulging tummy, an arched neck, and turned-out feet.

Unknowingly letting the pelvis shift into an anterior-tilt during belly dance activities is the one significant feature of this dance form that could be considered 'risky.'

Never overlook the importance of adhering to proper alignment and proper form when practicing all belly dance hip movements. If you are maintaining a neutral pelvis, your lower abdominal muscles will grow strong very quickly. They might even be quite fatigued after the four basic Hip Drills. On the other hand, if your lower back is hurting, it is most likely due to *poor pelvic placement* (anterior tilt) and *poor use* (relying on muscles in the back to create the hip-lift and hip-drop movements), Almost all of the basic hip-movements used in belly dance fitness should involve some degree of activation in the abdominal muscles.



## Quadratus lumborum

This muscle lies toward the lateral (side) part of the body. There is a right-sided quadratus lumborum and a left-sided quadratus lumborum. This muscle originates on the posterior iliac crest and inserts on the 12<sup>th</sup> rib and on the transverse processes of L1 – L5. Its fibers run vertical and oblique.

- ☺ For belly dancers, this is the all-important ‘hip hiker’ or ‘side-bender’ muscle. When the ribs and spine are fixed in place, the quadratus lumborum raises the pelvis on one side, creating a *hip-lift*.

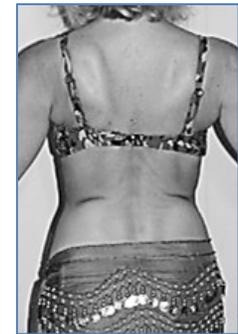


## Spinal muscles

Belly dance will strengthen the Erector spinae muscles and improve posture. The tone of this muscle group contributes to the development of the belly dancer’s strong supportive natural ‘girdle’ of postural support.

Erector spinae consists of three layered muscular components;

- Iliocostalis (most lateral portion)
- Longissimus
- Spinalis (most medial portion)

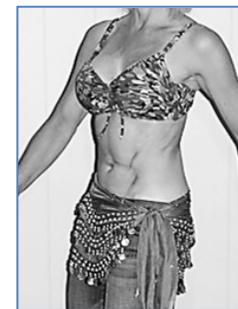


The Erector spinae are primarily muscles that extend the spine, but when they contract unilaterally (single sided), the Iliocostalis lumborum portion of erector spinae contributes to the belly dance movements of side-bending and rotation.

## Gluteal muscles

The three gluteal muscles assist in the power and definition of many belly dance movements, and the gluteal and abdominal muscles work together during pelvic-pulse movements. Let’s review their actions.

- Gluteus maximus is primarily a hip extensor, but in belly dance we will use this muscle to assist in movement which involves posterior pelvic tilt.
- Gluteus medius creates lateral flexion of the pelvis, abduction of the hip, and stabilizes the pelvis during walking or standing on one foot, Gluteus medius assists with both anterior and posterior tilt of the pelvis.
- Gluteus minimus creates abduction of the thigh, and assists in hip flexion and internal rotation. If the femur (leg) is fixed in space, gluteus minimus can assist in anterior pelvic tilt, lateral flexion, and rotation of the pelvis.



## **Learn the basic moves first**

### Basic belly dance steps

- Hip-shift / hip-slide
- Hip-sway
- Hip-lift, Hip-drop
- Hip-twist
- Hip-shimmy
- Pelvic pulse
- Loop
- Pelvic-circle, Hip-circle
- Figure 8 / Infinity-loop (horizontal or vertical hip movement)
- Chest-isolations
- Shoulder-isolations
- Shoulder-shimmy
- Camel
- Snake-arms

As you go through the course we will add to these basic movements by learning variations, dance combo steps, advanced dance combo steps and jazzy, stylized belly dance movements that are appropriate for a general fitness class population.

### **Benefits of Belly dance steps and movements**

- *Hip-shift, Hip-sway* - improves flexibility and strength in the lateral hips and thighs.
- *Hip-lifts, hip-drops* - increases flexibility in the hips; strengthens the iliopsoas muscle (hip flexor)
- *Hip-twist* – improves flexibility and strength in the obliques.
- *Hip-circle* - improves flexibility and strength in the gluteus medius, low back, and iliopsoas muscle.
- *Single-sided (vertical) hip-circle* - sculpts the waistline.
- *Pelvic-pulse* - strengthens the lower abdominals and buttocks.
  
- *Hip-shimmy* and *¾ shimmy* - improves circulation and release tension; develops rhythm, coordination and endurance; improves flexibility in the hips.
- *Vertical infinity-loop / vertical figure-8* - sculpts the waist.
- *Horizontal infinity-loop / horizontal figure-8* - improves flexibility and strength in the hips and lower abdominals.