



WELLBEING

“I tried chakra dancing for a week to see if it could change my negative outlook on life”

BY ELIZABETH MCCAFFERTY UPDATED 23 DAYS AGO



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Chakra dancing – a form of movement that promises to help the body release trauma and tension – is on the rise. Stylist tries it out...

For months, I'd been feeling sluggish and negative – a combination of bad news and bad luck making it hard to pave the way to positivity and productivity. In my quest for a better outlook, I'd tried everything from yoga classes to coming off social media for a bit, but nothing seemed to work. Then, my good friend Debs gifted me an online course that promised to “unlock and unblock your chakras in seven days by the power of dance”.

To say I was sceptical would be an understatement. I knew nothing about chakras, I'm a terrible dancer and thought it would take more than seven days to shed this heaviness, but her enthusiasm about the course (which costs from £16 to £45) piqued my curiosity.

I'm not alone in my interest. Ecstatic dance – a 'wellbeing movement practice' similar to chakra dancing that encourages its followers to move their bodies however they please as a way to release tension – has been steadily on the rise in recent years, with over 18.8 million posts under the hashtag on TikTok.



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Chakra dancing, however, is slightly more specific. Chakras are said to be various energy points within your body that correspond to different internal organs and nerve endings. According to devotees, we have seven chakras, and if any of these are blocked they will directly affect, both physically and mentally, points within your body. The idea is that moving to music can help unblock these areas and allow your energy to run freely in your body.

OVERCOMING THE SILLINESS

Fast forward a week: I'm in my bedroom wildly 'improv dancing'. I'm moving, as instructed, in whatever way feels natural in the moment: I find myself using strange hand gestures and jumping around while a mixture of flutes and deep bass-heavy beats that wouldn't be out of place at freshers' week plays loudly.

This is part of my first lesson with the course's practitioner, Natalie Southgate, who is also the founder of **Chakradance**, a company that offers online courses in the practice. Each session begins with Natalie talking to camera in a pre-recorded video about the issues the dance might help you overcome. Then, in a second video, we are encouraged to follow along, in our own style, with the dance that Natalie demonstrates. We finish with a guided meditation to wind down; the whole thing lasts around 30 minutes.

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Living in London, my space is admittedly quite small. I'm also extremely aware of my neighbour opposite, whose eye I awkwardly catch almost daily as our work desks both face out of our respective windows. But as I pulled the blind down halfway, lit a candle and prepared for spiritual bliss, I tried to eradicate my feelings of self-consciousness. “Our bodies remember all of our life experiences,” Natalie explains when we talk about the purpose of the sessions. “Even the less joyful times – the feeling of being bullied at school, trauma, grief over the loss of a loved one. The point is to use dance to help you release a trapped feeling from your body.”

By day three we are working on the 'solar plexus chakra', a dance that is supposed to help with low energy, depression and people-pleasing. Within six minutes, I'm dancing more ecstatically than ever before, shaking my head wildly and flinging my hair back and forth. Within nine minutes, the drum beats were getting more and more intense, while Natalie repeated affirmations such as, “You express all that you are”, “You're taking up your rightful space” and “You have reclaimed your own power”. Suddenly, at that moment, I got it. The idea of moving your body to alleviate stress or unrest – no matter how kooky it might appear to an onlooker – made perfect sense to me.

Look to history, though, and this should be no surprise. Dance has been used spiritually, culturally and in a celebratory way for thousands of years, but it wasn't until 1916 that psychologist Carl Gustav Jung acknowledged that dance can be an effective form of psychotherapy. And by the 1950s, dance therapy pioneer and psychotherapist Mary Whitehouse encouraged her patients to engage in improvised movement as a form of expression.

One thing is for sure, I'm certain I'll feel less self-conscious the next time I'm on a dance floor.

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