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Dancing can make you fit as a fiddle

By Knight-Ridder News Service

If indoor exercise is getting to you this winter, try dancing — it may offer the needed variety in your exercise program.

Social dancing can burn as many calories as walking, swimming or riding a bicycle, according to researchers at the Mayo Clinic. During 30 minutes of sustained dancing, you can burn between 200 and 400 calories. In one study, scientists attached pedometers to square dancers and found each person covered nearly five miles in a single evening.

Dancing may not provide all the conditioning you need, but it can help.

The degree of cardiovascular conditioning depends on how long you dance continuously and how regularly you do it, say Mayo researchers.

The side-to-side movements of many dances can strengthen your weight-bearing bones and can help prevent or slow loss of bone mass.

If you're recovering from heart or knee surgery, movement may help your rehabilitation. Dancing can be a healthful alternative to aerobic dance or jogging.