

An Evaluation of the Effects of Tango Dance on  
People with Depression and Comorbid Symptoms

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## Summary

**Objective:** The purpose of this project was to investigate tango dance as a possible therapy for depression and comorbid symptoms (e.g., anxiety, insomnia) in two populations, people with self-referred depression and seniors with age-related macular degeneration (ARMD). Results from four randomised control trials (RCTs) are reported and used to evaluate the effectiveness, safety, acceptability and tango compliance. The intensity and frequency of the sessions was varied across the trials. **Method:** The outcome measures included three or more of the following: depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia and fatigue, mindfulness, self-efficacy, satisfaction with life and self-esteem. These measures were assessed in each trial at pre-, post- intervention, and in addition, at 1-month follow-up for Trial 2 and Trial 3.

### First RCT (Study 1)

Sixty-six participants with self-referred depression completed a 6-week program of 1½ hours of tango or meditation per week, or they were wait-list controls. The results indicated that tango dance and mindfulness-meditation reduced depression levels after the program compared with the control group. Furthermore, tango dance was associated with increased levels of mindfulness compared with mindfulness-meditation and control groups.

### Second RCT (Study 2)

Sixty-four participants with self-referred depression completed an 8-week program of 1½ hours of tango, meditation or circuit-training per week, or they were wait-list controls. Participants in all three interventions showed improvement compared with the control group, but those completing tango dance showed a broader range of persistent benefits (e.g., reduced levels of depression and insomnia, and increased mindfulness).

**Third RCT (Study 3)**

Forty-one participants with self-referred depression completed an intensive 2-week program of 1½ hours of tango dance, 4 times per week or they were wait-list controls. Tango participants showed significant reductions in depression, anxiety, stress, and insomnia at post-test relative to controls, whereas satisfaction-with-life and self-efficacy significantly increased. At 1-month follow-up, depression, anxiety and stress levels remained low relative to wait-list controls.

**Fourth RCT (Study 4)**

Seventeen participants (ARMD) completed a 4-week program of 1½ hours of tango dance, twice per week or they were wait-list controls. Tango participants showed reduced depression levels, and increased satisfaction-with-life and self-esteem, relative to wait-list controls. **Conclusion:** The results of the four RCTs suggest that tango dance may be a useful treatment for depression and associated symptoms in people with self-referred depression and those diagnosed with vision impairment.