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## Wriggle Your Way to Greater Strength

by Michelle Mellon

It's an ancient art of expression, and seemingly unrelated to the sport of ultimate. But no matter your passion, belly dancing can help you reach your goal. ↓

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It started as something fun and different to do. A guaranteed way to get me out of the house each week so that my husband would stop worrying about me working at home all the time. Some stretching warm-ups, some basic moves, and then on to combinations. By the fourth class we were using zills (finger cymbals) and learning basic veil moves, and I was hooked on belly dancing.

Contrary to what you might think, belly dancing really **is** a full body workout. Of course there's the abdominal work, which contributes to core body strength for better stability and center of gravity. The lower back gets an expected workout, as do the hips. I was never really one to gyrate about freely--why draw attention to the very areas of my body that give me the most grief?! These classes have taught me how to *lift myself out of my hips* for freer movement. This has come in particularly handy I find when I'm on the mark and need to move quickly to adjust to a thrower's fakes. The unexpected bonus for me was arm strength. I had been going to the gym and using weights for stronger throws, but primarily my backhands. But the lifting and holding and whipping motions of the veil also require enduring upper body strength, and who can complain about stronger shoulders and forearms?

There are videos out there to teach you the basics, but my recommendation is to take a class with a live instructor. Not only do you have the benefit of an on-site tutorial, but you can also learn from the mistakes (or triumphs) of the other students in your class. In addition, there have been several moves that are risky to knees, back, or diaphragm if done incorrectly. I'd much rather have someone walk around and correct my positioning *before* I injure myself on a move.

The obvious bonus to belly dancing is that it makes you feel good about yourself. There is something primal and **sexy** about it that has nothing to do with superficialities. You are

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in complete control, and you use your body to define what's happening around you. That kind of confidence carries over into other areas of your life, as well.

I'm into my third session, with no stop in sight. Except that now my coed teams wants to start practicing during the week, too, and probably on the same night as my class. Of course ultimate will win out, but we'll see how I can wriggle my way into having both?

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