

"I GOT MY GROOVE BACK!"

Mary Beth Quirk, 28, was in a slump and longed to love her workout again. **FITNESS** helped her find a whole new rhythm.

The Goal After 11 years of lessons and recitals, I gave up ballet at age 14, when I hit puberty and felt self-conscious about my suddenly curvy body. I no longer wanted to be seen in a leotard. But that was pretty much the last time I loved exercising. Fast forward 14 years and a few desk jobs and I'd gained weight living off instant ramen (I know, it's terrible!), pasta and pizza. I'd been in Brooklyn, New York, five years, and every year I said, "Before I turn 'insert age,' I'm finally going to get healthy and work out." I'd go gangbusters at the gym for a few weeks, but my heart was never in it. I wanted the feeling I got from dancing back when all I thought about was having fun.

The Game Plan When **FITNESS** offered to help me return to the dance floor, I worried I'd be the chubby girl trying to keep up. I headed off to meet my stellar support team and hoped for the best.

TOP TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

Elizabeth Burwell, co-owner of High Performance NYC, a personal training studio in New York City "Jumping rope is great cross-training for dance workouts. It forces you to perfect your rhythm by responding to the beat of the rope."

Dawn Jackson Blatner, R.D., **FITNESS** advisory board member "Instead of having an all-or-nothing attitude toward treats, like Mary Beth had with cupcakes, switch 'no sweets ever' to 'social sweets only.' Indulging with others makes eating treats special and mindful rather than a guilty solo binge."

Karen Arceneaux, dance instructor at the Ailey Extension of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York City "After your instructor demonstrates a new move, if you're still unsure, select a spot in class behind a more advanced student whom you can quickly glance at for reminders."

AS TOLD TO AYREN JACKSON-CANNADY

Me, by the Numbers

	START	NOW
Weight	170 lb	153 lb
Height	5'5"	5'5"
Chest	38"	36"
Waist	37½"	34½"
Hips	42½"	38"

Then, and "Wow! I'm dancing again."

My New To-Do List

Put Muscle in Your Hustle

By the time I met my trainer, Elizabeth, I'd been a fitness fugitive for so long, I could barely do a push-up in our first session. Elizabeth, a professional dancer, created a routine to get me dance-ready: Each workout we did included planks and squats to build my core and legs, plus three days a week I practiced moves from her DanceFit group class to build my stamina.

Go Green, Save Green

I always thought that to eat right, I'd have to double my grocery bills. My nutritionist, Dawn, suggested I cut down on calories and try to fill half my plate at each meal with produce: chopped fruit with yogurt and a sprinkle of granola rather than a bagel for breakfast, salad with a half-sandwich for lunch instead of pizza, and more broccoli with less chicken for dinner. By laying off the noodles and opting for extra veggies, I was eating more but taking in three to four times fewer calories. And I saved \$20 a week by nixing pricey takeout.

Bust a Move

My first day back in dance class—this time I chose a modern technique—was a little intimidating. But I looked around the room of adults in sweats and thought, here we go. My instructor, Karen, started us out with breathing exercises, then introduced flat-back movements: You repeatedly hinge forward at the hips to make your body into a number seven. It was hard to connect body and mind again, but by my fourth class I was turning and jumping with ease.

Status Check

Nine weeks of dancing helped me rediscover the feel-good magic of moving that I'd been missing—and lose 17 pounds. These days I happily rush to dance class after work each Friday night and run outdoors to build my staying power. Friends are amazed by the change in my body, and I haven't felt this energized since I last wore a tutu.



KAREN PEARSON, HAIR: JENNIFER BRENT FOR TRESEMME AT KRAMER; MAKEUP: KRAMER; MAKEUP: EMILY KATE WARREN USING MAKEUP FOREVER; CHRISTOPHER FISCHER SWEATER; CAPEZZO LEOTARD; AMERICAN APPAREL LEGGINGS