



London, UK

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;369:m2247<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2247>

Published: 15 June 2020

Why I . . . dance

Consultant rheumatologist Richard Hull tells **Adrian O'Dowd** why Scottish country dancing is the perfect blend of physical and mental exercise

Adrian O'Dowd

One well accepted way of destressing after work is physical exercise—but add mental concentration and fun, and the results are all the better. So says Richard Hull, partially retired consultant rheumatologist based at the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust.

Hull, who qualified from the University of Birmingham in 1975, has enjoyed a lifetime of dancing as a hobby and would recommend it to anyone.

Part of the reason the hobby is so enjoyable is the mix of physical and mental exercise that it offers. "Some of the dances are quite a memory test," Hull says. "It's not just a physical thing; it's two hours of exercise and a memory test too."

When he was working full time, Hull was a busy consultant rheumatologist, a clinical director, and he did a lot of management.

"The dancing was a way of switching off because you've got to put your mind to it. You can't think about other things while you're trying to remember what to do," he says. "It's a complete shift from your work mode. What I particularly enjoy about dancing is that it's a social thing. You do meet friends outside medicine."

While dancing requires some commitment, Hull says he never found it difficult to fit it into his life. He first got into the sport when he did his student elective in Stornoway in 1974. "Friday night dances were half modern dance and half Scottish dancing," he explains.

His connection with Scotland continued during three years spent as a registrar in Aberdeen where he took part in a group that did hill and mountain walking as well as dancing. "Then in 1989 I was appointed as a consultant in Portsmouth and I joined a small country dancing group in our village nine miles north of the city."

He later joined the Southsea Reel Club, which has been going for about 60 years. Outside of lockdown, the club usually meets a few times a week.

Hull retired from full time work three years ago but still does clinical work, is honorary secretary of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, and does some teaching and examining.

Nevertheless, he's still committed to dancing and says, "It's a good thing for retirement in that it keeps me busy."

"In our club on a Friday night, we regularly get 40 to 50 people from all different backgrounds and age ranges—from people in their 40s to their 90s. It keeps us fit and we enjoy it."

How to make the change

- Make space for leisure activities in your life. It's important to remember that if you work hard, you should play hard
- Embrace the fun side of dancing and don't be embarrassed if you are not a naturally gifted dancer. It is something you can enjoy, whatever your level
- Seek out information about local groups or clubs near you by visiting the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society website (www.rscds.org) or searching on Google
- Encourage work colleagues to come with you to the local groups and boost their membership

Footnote: Since the start of the pandemic, all dancing activity has stopped and an annual ceilidh, held for Hull's local hospice, was cancelled. Most of the ticket money already received was donated to the hospice, however. "We are very much together as a community, supporting each other, particularly those people living alone and isolated," Hull says. "Dances have been devised for single couples, with taped music, and if you are alone you can use a broomstick as a ghost. We look forward to when we can exercise and socialise together as a club rather than virtually."