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Introduction

Congratulations for choosing a belly dance workout to improve your fitness. I am convinced that your body will thank you for it in many ways.

Maybe you are just beginning to learn belly dance, maybe you are already an advanced dancer, performer or instructor. Whatever your current level of belly dance expertise may be, you will certainly be aware that a proper warm-up technique is essential for a healthy dance practice. Not only can it prevent strain on your muscles, other discomforts or possible injuries. When implemented on a regular basis, it will enhance your performance and shape your body contours.

“Ariana’s Warm-Up Guide For Belly Dancers” provides a series of exercises that will lead you into a state of maximum concentration and gently stretch the muscles involved in belly dancing in order to improve your flexibility.

The recommended exercises are especially beneficial for beginners because they prepare the body for learning certain belly dancing movements as well as a correct posture. Advanced belly dancers will enjoy the workout as it enables them to quickly define their muscles before a performance and helps them be present during the performance. Belly dance instructors are welcome to use the exercises in their classes.

Along with step-by-step instructions for the exercises you will receive little nudges on how to let your mind participate in the training. I find it very helpful to have the intention to release all your thoughts when you start the workout and to focus only on your well-being. It is a very energizing experience to find yourself in total harmony with your body once all the mind chatter is gone.

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The 12-minute warm-up suggested in this ebook is meant to work up a sweat, however, there are no impact exercises. When properly executed, none of the suggested movements should cause any pain or discomfort. Should you experience any pain or discomfort, please stop exercising immediately.

If you have a certain body condition and are unsure whether working out or belly dancing will benefit your health, make sure to consult your physician before you practice.

There are no preferences regarding the music for your workout. In my belly dancing classes I alternate between using slow Egyptian dance routines, Tribal Dance music, Trance or Techno music and Meditation music. Choose any music that you feel good with at the given moment and that gets you in the mood to dance.

It will not surprise you that the more often you use this warm-up, the better your results will be. Give yourself some time for this short workout several times a week.

Enjoy and be inspired!
Step 1 - Breathe

Stretch your arms out to the side, slowly lift them up over your head and take a deep breath in while you do it. When your hands meet, hold your breath for a second, then slowly bring your arms back down while you exhale. Repeat 6 times.

Enhance the quality of this exercise by closing your eyes. Notice the energy your body receives while you breathe in and enjoy how it makes you feel strong. When you exhale, imagine that all tension and thoughts leave your body and that you feel calm and relaxed.
Step 2 - Stretch Your Body

Reach up over your head with your left arm as high as you can and count to 6. Bring your left arm down and repeat exercise with your right arm.

Imagine that you want to pick a fruit from a tree over your head. Try to stretch one side of your body to a maximum while keeping your balance on both feet.
Step 3 - Bend To The Side

Lift up your left arm while you place your right arm on your hip. Slowly bend over to the right side and count to 6. Come back up and rest for 3 seconds. Bend over to the right side a little further and count to 12. Come back to vertical position. Repeat the exercise with your right arm up and your left arm on your hip and bend over to the left side.

When repeated frequently, this exercise will do wonders for your body shape and flexibility. You may deepen the experience by exhaling while you bend over, continuing to breathe while you are holding the stretch and inhaling while you are coming back up. Try it!
Step 4 - Stretch Your Back

Stretch both hands out to the side and bend forward while turning to the left side. Your legs should be straight. When your back, neck and head are in a horizontal position, hold the stretch for a moment, then bring your head down towards your left knee and let your arms drop to the floor. Count to 3 and come back up. Repeat exercise on the right side.

If you are unable to touch your knee with your head at first, do not force it! Just move your head towards your knee as far as you can without feeling any pain and know that if you keep repeating the workout, your flexibility will increase a little bit every time.
Step 5 - Roll Your Shoulders

Lift up both shoulders, move them backwards, drop them down and move them forward as though you are drawing a circle. Repeat 6 times.

Advanced dancers may prefer to do alternating shoulder rolls or change the direction and roll them forward.
Step 6 - Bend Down

Lift both hands above your head and bend forward until your hands touch the floor. Your legs should be straight. Try to bring your head as close to your knees as you can. Count to 3, then bring your back up slowly moving each vertebrae at a time. Relax.

The experience of this exercise can be deepened if you exhale while you bend forward and let your arms drop to the floor while you exhale. Consciously release all muscle tension that you might feel in your neck, shoulder and back area. Take a deep invigorating breath when you come back up.
Step 7 - Roll Your Head

Move your head down toward your chest, then slowly bend it over to the left side. Move your head back and slowly bend it over to the right side. Repeat 4 times.

Note: This movement should be performed very slowly without overstretching any muscles in your shoulder or neck area. Try to inhale during upward movements and exhale when moving your head down. Should you encounter any discomfort, stop the exercise right away!
**Step 8 - Stretch Your Lower Back**

Lift up your left knee and grab it with both arms and pull it up to your chest. Count to 6. Release your leg and relax. Repeat exercise with your right knee.

It may be a little challenging to hold your balance standing on one leg. If so, make sure your knee is bent a little bit, take a deep breath, focus on the exercise and try again.
Step 9 - Stretch Your Thighs

Bend your left leg up toward your rear side until you can grab it with your left hand. Pull up further with your hand and count to 6. Release your leg and relax. Repeat exercise with your right leg.

You can make this exercise more powerful by closing your eyes and taking 3 breaths while standing balanced on one foot.
**Step 10 - Stretch Your Shoulders**

Clasp your hands above your head and move them backwards as far as possible. Count to 3 and release hands. Repeat exercise.

If you are unable to move your hands backwards at first, just stand with your hands clasped over your head. Keep trying to move your hands backwards a little more each time you do the exercise. Besides improving the flexibility of your shoulders, this exercise also trains the muscles on your hands and wrists which will enhance your ability to perform elegant arm and hand movements.
**Step 11- Stretch Your Neck**

*Clasp your hands before your chest and stretch them out horizontally. Now slowly move your head down between your arms and count to 3. Release hands, then repeat the exercise.*

![Step 11- Stretch Your Neck](image)

**Step 12- Shake Your Body**

*Shake your legs and your arms for as long as you feel comfortable and relax.*
Step 13 - Traditional Position

Stand with your feet parallel about 6 inches apart. Knees are slightly bent. Your pelvis is pushed forward a little making your back completely straight. Lift your bust up a bit and make sure your shoulders are leaning back. Your arms can be comfortably stretched to the side slightly above waist level.

Since this is a basic starting position for many belly dancing movements, I recommend that you constantly keep working on improving your posture to be able to master this position with elegance.
Step 14 - Slide Your Pelvis Horizontally

Start from the Traditional Position (Step 13). Now begin to let your pelvis slide horizontally to the left side (do not turn or tilt it), count to 4, slide over to the right side and count to 4 again. Repeat 2 times.

If you feel a resistance in the muscles on the side of your hips and upper thighs, breathe in and send the energy to that area. This particular exercise will prepare your hips and pelvis for doing hip circles, figure 8s and hip accents. Keep on practicing regularly to make the distance between the right and the left end a little bigger each time.
**Step 15 - Slide Your Upper Body Horizontally**

Stand in Traditional Position (Step 13) and keep your pelvis and hips still while you move your upper body to the left side and then to the right side. Repeat 2 times.

For additional fun you may want to close your eyes while you perform the exercise. Notice that the attention needed for the process will stop all other thoughts that are on your mind at that moment and leave you totally at ease.
**Step 16 - Slide Your Ribcage Horizontally**

Stand in Traditional Position (Step 13). Slide only your ribcage to the left and then to the right. Notice that feet, hips and shoulders should not move during the exercise. Repeat 2 times.

*This is one of my favorite workout movements because it trains the muscles along the side of your body from the waist up to the arms and thus magically trims your waist.*
Step 17 - Slide Your Pelvis Forward And Back

Start in Traditional Position (Step 13). Then put your hands on your hips and push your pelvis forward (do not bend, turn or tilt it). Count to 4. Now push the pelvis backwards as far as you can with your back straight. Avoid a hollow back position! Count to 4. Repeat 2 times.

Many belly dancing movements are developed by shifting your pelvis - and only your pelvis. Focus on keeping your upper body in place, push up your bust and relax your shoulders.
**Step 18 - Slide Your Body Forward And Back**

Start in Traditional Position (Step 13) and put your hands on your hips. Lean your upper body forward as far as you can without bending your back or losing your balance while your lower body, hips and pelvis stay in place. Count to 4. Come back into starting position, then lean upper body backwards. Count to 4. Repeat 2 times.

*Here is another exercise that can be more challenging when performed with your eyes closed. Enjoy!*
Step 19 - Slide Your Ribcage Forward And Back

Start from Traditional Position (Step 13) and put your hands on your hips. Push your ribcage forward. Count to 4. Come back and draw your ribcage backwards. Count to 4. Repeat 2 times.

Make sure that your shoulders and lower body (below waist) remain in place.
Step 20 - Pelvis Turns

Start with Traditional Position (Step 13). Twist your left hip forward 3 times. Repeat with right hip.

An important exercise that prepares your pelvis for hip circles, figure 8s, hip lifts and twist steps. The more often you practice these pelvis turns, the faster the mobility of your hips will increase.
Step 21 - Upper Body Turns

Stand in Traditional Position (Step 13). Slowly turn your upper body to the left side and look over your left shoulder while your lower body remains in place. Hold that position and count to 3. Turn back. Repeat with right side.

Advanced dancers should perform this exercise faster, work on moving their arms elegantly and integrating this figure in their dance.
**Step 22 - Move Hips Up And Down**

Start in Traditional Position (Step 13) bending your knees a little bit more than usual. Now push your left hip upward by stretching your left leg. This will cause your right hip to move down. Count to 3. Move your left hip down by bending the left knee again and simultaneously stretch your right leg to bring up your right hip. Repeat 2 times.

![Step 22 - Move Hips Up And Down](image)

**Step 23 - Shake Your Body**

Shake your legs and your arms for as long as you feel comfortable and relax (as in Step 12).


**Step 24 - Breathe**

Stretch your arms out to the side, slowly lift them up over your head and take a deep breath in while you do it. When your hands meet, hold your breath for a second, then slowly bring your arms back down while you exhale. Repeat 6 times.

(Repeating Step 1)

*Use this final exercise to concentrate on your breath. Relax and be pleased with yourself for having accomplished the workout!*
Having performed these basic stretching and flexibility exercises, your body is now ready for dancing. Right after this warm-up I usually begin my belly dance lessons with a special endurance training.

In order to train the thigh muscles which are responsible for carrying most of your body’s weight during belly dance, I have found it very useful to use different shimmy exercises. I choose a certain shimmy movement (e.g. the hip shimmy) and practice it to a Masmoudi rhythm for about 3 to 5 minutes while concentrating on performing the movement as constant as possible. After that the thigh muscles are relaxed by shaking the legs for about half a minute.

Besides enabling you to build up stamina fast, this exercise will quickly enhance the quality of your shimmy movements. Also, you will develop your senses for oriental music by listening to basic Arabic rhythms again and again. And - most important of all - you will be trained to perform your shimmies in time with the beat.

The concept of consistently repeating a certain movement to a basic rhythm may sound boring to you at first. However, I consider it essential for entering certain movements into your body’s muscular memory. If you are serious about shortening your learning curve as a belly dance student, this learning concept will amaze you.

To give you an idea how this works, I have created a short video where I show you how to work on your hip shimmy. You can access this free video at http://learnbellydancewithariana.com/videos/hipshimmyworkout.
Cool Down

Make it a habit to add a special cool down routine after you finish your belly dance practice, lesson, class or performance.

Shake out all your muscles (as suggested in Step 12 and Step 23). Bend forward and let your arms drop to the floor while you exhale and consciously release all muscle tension that you might feel in your neck, shoulder and back area. Come back up very slowly. End your cool down with the breathing exercise (as described in Step 24).

Be aware of how much better your body feels after dancing and thank it for performing so well. Notice also that your mind appears much more calm and clear after practicing belly dance.
Fascinated by a live belly dance performance, Ariana started taking her first belly dancing lessons as a teenager. Since then she has studied with a variety of instructors, most of which were professional Egyptian belly dancers.

Over the last three decades, Ariana has performed on stages and at private events in Germany and the US. She also teaches classes for beginners, intermediate and advanced students both in English and German in the area of Mannheim, Germany, where she currently lives.

Having been greatly inspired by the Classic Egyptian Belly Dance which is mostly improvised, Ariana has made it her mission in the last 20 years to develop a method to teach students how to master and enjoy the Oriental dance intuitively without relying on a choreography.

Learn
how to enhance your dancing skills
create radiance and presence
develop a unique artistic performance

For more information go to
http://learnbellydancewithariana.com/the-7-secrets-of-improvisation

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