



# Shimmy, Shimmy, Shake

Bellying up to those New Year's resolutions

**T**here are two traditions in January: 1. vowing to exercise and lose those excess holiday pounds, and 2. abandoning those well-intended resolutions shortly thereafter. While I keep the ideas fresh every year — new exercise DVDs, fitness center membership, the latest gadgets and home equipment, another healthy recipe book, renewing the food shopping vows — the novelty soon wears off and I'm back to my bad old ways.

2014, however, will be different, however, because I've found a perfect way to jiggle and wiggle the Christmas cookie fat off — belly dancing! There are several options for taking belly dance classes locally, and the choices are neither expensive nor intimidating. The classes are entertaining, provide a vigorous workout, and are fun. And unless exercise is fun, I'm probably not going to stick with it.

"Belly dancing offers a unique combination of benefits. It's a great way to lose weight and have fun doing it," says instructor and performer Aleenah Flit. "Unlike many exercise programs that can make you feel exhausted, a belly-dance class will give you a lasting energy boost. Given the immense variety of movements, it is easily tailored to every ability and fitness level. Belly dance utilizes every muscle group and provides overall toning and strengthening, while improving balance and coordination," Aleenah adds.

Explains belly dance artist Tava: "People should know that they may come for a dance class but what they'll get is a community. The movements are challenging and require a unique style of body awareness to master the subtlety, but we all have a great time along the way. The environment is supportive and challenging."

Tava acknowledges that belly dancing is not necessarily guaranteed to make participants shed pounds, but there *are* tangible benefits: "low-impact exercise, improved posture, core strength, improved confidence (with commitment), community, increased body awareness, [enhanced] muscle tone in quads, obliques (all of ab muscles), glutes and, in some cases, arms."

Elm City Shimmy's Diana Saylor teaches American Tribal Style belly dancing, which is, she explains, "a group improvisation format invented in the U.S. and inspired by folkloric dances of the Middle East and Northern Africa, classical Indian dance and Flamenco."

"Dancers learn a shared vocabulary of movement and non-verbal cues, and then dance in small groups with one dancer leading at a time," the performer/instructor adds. "The end result looks choreographed but is actually created in the moment."

Saylor describes belly dancing as "a fun exercise form that can really help build one's grace and body confidence. American Tribal Style in particular is very interactive — it involves trust and communication between dance partners, so it has a community-building social aspect that appeals to many people."

The Yale Affiliates Belly Dance Society holds and sponsors classes, and is open to non-Yale folks as well. The organization, which promotes Middle Eastern dance, culture and music at Yale and in the surrounding community, is run by Yale students and affiliates. The troupe performs regularly at a wide variety of events.

If you are interested stepping into harem pants and a coin skirt, Aleenah ([Aleenah.com](http://Aleenah.com)) offers classes at the Fitness Haven in New Haven as well as through Woodbridge Recreation, Wallingford Parks & Rec Department, ERACE Adult Education Center in Branford, Wallingford Adult Education, Cheshire Adult Education, West Haven Adult Education and North Haven Adult Education.

Tava ([BellydancebyTava.com](http://BellydancebyTava.com)) can be found at Work-it Dance and Fitness in South Norwalk, Studio 44 in Westport, and teaching "History of Bellydance: Technique and Lecture" at Norwalk Community College.

Saylor ([Elmcityshimmy.com](http://Elmcityshimmy.com)) shimmies at New Haven Strength & Fitness and offers a \$5 community class ("taster" classes where she teaches two to four moves and strings them together into a combo to practice), as well as ongoing fundamentals and intermediate classes. For information on the Yale Belly Dance Society, [yale.edu/bellydance](http://yale.edu/bellydance)

