

Pole Dance

Exercise That Challenges the Core

BY PATTIE CINELLI



CLOCKWISE

1. Jessalynn Medairy of Pole Pressure dances on a street pole. Photo: Courtesy of Pole Pressure

2. An instructor at The P Spot Fitness Studio helps a student go inverted. Photo: Courtesy of The P Spot Fitness Studio.

3. A class at The P Spot Fitness Studio. Photo: Courtesy of The P Spot Fitness Studio.

My mind was made up before I stepped foot into The P Spot Fitness Studio on 10 Street, N.E. No high heels and no exotic or acrobatic moves for me. I had a preconceived idea of what pole dance was and it wasn't for me. I was just there because I was writing this article.

But studio owner Michaela Brown persuaded me to take a sample of her classes. In just 20 minutes my mind, body and spirit was transformed. I donned 6-inch heels (though I didn't have to), performed exercises I didn't think I could do and hurt in muscles I thought were strong and flexible. I felt tall (5'8 1/2"!)

and powerful. Pole Dance is not what most of us think it is. It is a vigorous form of exercise for women "looking for real results," explained Jessalyn Medairy, owner of Pole Pressure, the pole dance company that offers classes

at Results the Gym on Capitol Hill. Both she and Michaela talked about the significant amount of weight they lost and continue to keep off as a result of pole dance. Another surprise -- pole dance is fun.

"We use fun to get people in the door and keep them coming back for the fitness benefits," said Michaela. "It's fitness for real." Both pole programs are exercise-science based with trained professionals teaching classes and private sessions. Both offer a variety of classes that include cardio, strength and flexibility workouts on and off the pole. Both programs are for all ages, shapes and fitness levels. Michaela's oldest student is 80 and Jessalynn's is 88.

Pole dance requires significant strength, flexibility and endurance. In one move Michaela taught me, she asked me to lean against the pole with the front of my body,

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reach up and grab the pole, then extend my legs out straight on either side of the pole. First I held for eight counts, then she asked me to pull myself up the pole. I laughed. "No way," I said. "Try it anyway," she insisted. I did and moved only a millimeter up the pole. "See," I said. "I can't do it." "You thought you couldn't so you can't. Change your thought the next time, and you might be surprised," she said.

According to one source, pole dancing probably started in America in the 1920s when traveling show dancers used a tent pole as a prop in their acts. Pole dancing originated in China as a form of acrobatics that is performed on stage, in cabarets and the circus in a non-erotic environment. Pole dancing gradually moved from circus tents to bars in the 1950s where it is often performed less gymnastically with a dancer simply holding a pole or moving around it without performing any athletic or acrobatic tricks. Since the mid 2000s promoters of pole dance fitness competitions have been trying to change peoples' perception of pole dance and to promote it as a legitimate form of dance and acrobatics. They have also petitioned to include it in the Olympics as one of the competitive sports.

Pole Dance can be your main way to stay fit or an alternative form of fitness one or two times a week, says Jessalynn. She became interested in the workout six years ago through classes she took in Baltimore. Two-and-a-half years ago she started Pole Pressure, and in addition to Capitol Hill she has classes at two other gyms in DC and a studio in Leesberg, VA. Jessalynn has become a master trainer and placed in the top 12 of U.S. pole dancers in 2009 and 2010, She also has competed internationally and is the organizer of the International Pole Convention. The classes at Results are open to men and are done barefoot and in comfortable clothing.

Michaela discovered pole dance through her passion for making fitness fun. At Georgetown she was the first African American to be a member and then the captain of the field hockey team. After graduation she turned down law school and switched her career to fitness. As a personal trainer and group exercise instructor, "I found that treadmills and dumbbells don't motivate most of us to get out of bed." She took up hip-hop dance aerobics as a way to "trick people into exercising." In 2006 Michaela bought a property in northeast and converted it to a gym which became the first pole dance studio in DC. A year ago she moved to 10 Street, NE. "I started with 10 clients and no poles. I couldn't afford them. I taught an earlier version of my strip (no disrobing involved) aerobics class. Some days no one showed up." Now Michaela has 11 poles, more than 5,000 clients, a nutrition program



2. Jessalynn Medairy of Pole Pressure practices an inverted move. Photo: Courtesy of Pole Pressure

for her clients and for residents of the House of Ruth that includes free hip hop dance aerobic classes and a yearly weight loss retreat to Cancun. She also has offered a Ladies Night for wives and fans of DC United since 2008. She has taught celebrities, high ranking federal employees, athletes, housewives and students. "One of my most memorable clients was a woman who worked out until she was eight-and-a-half month's pregnant. She was an inspiration to others."

Michaela's website, "bringitupsexy.com" comes from an incident that occurred in one of her classes. A student stumbled and fell to the ground when working out on the pole. "After I knew she was okay, I told her, 'Don't worry girl, just bring it up sexy and act like it was part of the show.'"

Michaela says, although she loves teaching all, she has the most fun teaching pole fitness classes because "it dispels expectations -- I'm too big, too old, to unfit -- I see the greatest and quickest transformations in students by their second class."

Don't let this fitness trend pass you by. You owe it to yourself to see what it feels like to have fun and work yourself to your limit. Pole dance can spice up your workout or, if you are a gym-phobic, it can be a perfect place to start getting fit.

For more information about pole dance log onto: www.bringitupsexy.com or www.polepressure.com. To reserve a class at Results (you don't have to be a member) call 410-952-0524.

Contact P Spot Studio at 202-629-4122.

Pattie Cinelli is a fitness professional who has been teaching, training and lecturing in the Washington metro area for more than 20 years. Email her at: fitness@pattiecinnelli.com. ★