

Learning to Belly Dance as an Adult...

By Karen

There's something I want to stress to those of you who are starting to learn bellydance (or anything for that matter) as an adult. As adults, we can be really hard on ourselves and our perceived lack of progress. I think sometimes we compare ourselves to kids, who seem to learn so much faster. (Keyword is SEEM!) Remember, kids are exposed to their activity on a schedule. Piano classes every Tuesday. 30 minutes of practice every night at 6:30. They do this for YEARS! If your child starts tap dance at age 4 and you encourage her to practice and continue classes, at age 14 she's going to be darn good, right? That's 10YEARS of practice. She didn't get good overnight. So why do we think we have to become professionals or even advanced students after just 6 months or even 2 years of bellydance classes?

Keep it in perspective. If you practice 2 or 3 times a week, you're going to make more progress than if you just practice along with your video on Saturday morning. If you practice every day, you'll see faster results, but you must STILL be realistic. For some of you, you are training your body to do something it has NEVER done before. Many of you have had no dance experience before this. Your body is a bit confused. It's not used to being asked what you're asking of it. You have to gradually build up flexibility to increase your range of motion.

I suggest keeping a journal of what you're learning and where you're having success and problems. The benefit of the journal is that it makes you analyze your learning. BUT, it's also a wonderful motivator, as you can look back through the pages and see that your 3/4 is lovely today, but just 6 months ago you thought you'd NEVER get it! Suhaila Salimpour mentioned in one of her workshops is that you are a different person EVERY DAY, thanks to hormones, the amount of stress and sleep you had, etc. So today you might have a really great long stretch and you can zill your heart out without missing a beat, but tomorrow your muscles may be tighter, your zilling slower, etc. And the next day it's different again.

Don't take your body for granted. In your warm-up, try to start feeling your body and seeing if you can find tight spots, loose spots, parts that may need an extra stretch or more attention. As you warm up, you can rediscover who your body is today and make allowances for that. Above all -- don't get discouraged and quit or skip a practice!

If you do get frustrated, know that EVERYBODY gets discouraged at some point -- even famous professional dancers. Write down in your journal what frustrates you. You WILL get past it. I promise you!!!