

[IMAGE]

A New Day in Health

By Editorial Staff

Dancing can be a fun, high-energy way to stay in shape. Daily practices, workouts and performances push professional dancers to new levels of fitness. Find out what a healthy lifestyle means to accomplished dancer Tina Cannon, who stars in Celine Dion's "A New Day" in Las Vegas.

For most people, the thought of getting out on the dance floor evokes either great excitement or intense fear. Whether you're a wallflower or a fanatic, dance is making its way to the forefront of mainstream media. Season after season, reality shows like "Dancing with the Stars" and "So You Think You Can Dance" pop up, introducing all varieties of dance to the public.

As any dance enthusiast will attest, dancing can transform your life. The combination of music and movement can renew a tired soul, release hidden creativity, trigger old memories and turn sadness into joy, even if for only a few minutes. Dancing is all about the mind-body connection, and it can be a fun and fulfilling way to stay in shape. A half hour of sustained dancing can burn between 200 and 400 calories. Dancing also boosts brain power and memory skills by requiring you to remember dance steps and sequences. The multi-directional, weight-bearing movements of dance can improve joint mobility, bone density, balance, posture and agility.

Tina Cannon, lead dancer and dance captain in Celine Dion's A New Day in Las Vegas. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Tina Cannon, lead dancer and dance captain in Celine Dion's "A New Day" in Las Vegas. With dozens of dance styles to choose from - ballroom, swing, jazz, tap, modern, salsa, hip-hop - a dancer's life is never boring. Just ask Tina Cannon, lead dancer and dance captain in Celine Dion's "A New Day" in Las Vegas. Tina studied dance on scholarship with the Cleveland San Jose Ballet, the Joffrey Ballet, the Boston Ballet, the Rochester City Ballet and Steps on Broadway. She was a Radio City Rockette and toured the U.S. with the Broadway show "Fosse." In this interview, Tina shares the joys and stresses of staying in the best shape of her life as a professional dancer.

As a dancer in "A New Day" with Celine Dion in Las Vegas, what is a day in your life like?

I'm a dancer in the show, but I'm also one of two dance captains, which makes my role pretty unique. That means I know, teach and maintain all of the show's choreography and run rehearsals, and make casting decisions. At about 3 p.m., my day begins at "A New Day," which may entail running a rehearsal or taking a dance class like ballet or modern.

At 5 p.m., I start working with the other captain on the "ins and outs" of the show, going over who is sick or injured. We go over each dance and who's in it. Between 5:30-6:30 p.m., we have a note session for the entire cast, where I do a play-by-play of who's doing what for each dance number. We go through everything on stage, working formations and timing. After that, I eat dinner. Then I prepare for the show.

From 7-8 p.m., I take a yoga class to clear my mind and focus. I balance out my body by stretching, strengthening and warming up. Then I put on my make-up, do my hair and get in costume. At 8:30 p.m., the show begins. During the encore song, whether I need it or not, I stick my legs in an ice bucket up to my knees for 5-10 minutes. Then I go on stage and take my bow. That's the end of my day.

What did it take for you to become a dancer and later, a dance captain for "A New Day"?

The first step was auditioning. Auditions were held around the world, and I auditioned in Las Vegas. We rehearsed for nine months, the first five months of which were in Belgium. This was an amazing period of time. It was a big, creative world for us - we danced and trained in everything you can imagine from bungee to trampoline, gymnastics, percussion and singing. The director, Franco Dragone, wanted well-rounded dancers who could do all sorts of things because he didn't know what the show would be yet. We just played and created. I felt like a kid at summer camp doing all of these artistic, athletic and adventurous activities.

We then brought the show to Las Vegas for four months, working directly on the stage. The stage is a beast in itself. It's at an incline, called a "rake," which completely changes your center of gravity and how we normally work. We took all that creative material and tried to put it on stage and found that most of it didn't work because of the incline.

Your director of health services is a doctor of chiropractic, correct?

Tina Cannon, lead dancer and dance captain in Celine Dion's A New Day in Las Vegas. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark I believe in taking a proactive approach to maintaining my health, rather than a reactive approach. The health director is a firm advocate of that as well. Our health services department

offers us Pilates, massage therapy, physical therapy, as well as chiropractic care. I'm definitely a firm believer in massage therapy to relax my tense muscles and to prepare me for chiropractic adjustments.

When you do a long-running show like this, you're doing the same thing night after night, and like I said, we're on a raked stage. So you can imagine the impact when we land from jumping, how it can change the alignment of your spine around and throw things out of whack.

As a dancer, I'm tremendously aware of my body. I can tell when I'm out of alignment or I don't have the proper range of motion or I feel pain in an extreme range of motion - things that I wouldn't normally feel. I find that chiropractic care is extremely important in maintaining my health. I see my chiropractor once every other week for maintenance, and then as needed. Sometimes I'll throw my head out of alignment from a turn and I'll feel my cervical spine pinching. I'll go to him right away to bring my spine into correct alignment in order to work from a solid foundation again.

Have you ever suffered an injury that threatened your ability to perform? If so, how did you recover?

One time on stage, I did a jump where I had to land on one foot, at an incline. I landed in a way that made my ankle roll. My calf seized up, went into spasm and wouldn't let go. I literally hopped off stage. After finding dancers to fill in my roles, our chiropractor came up to stage level to work on me. I had microtears in my calf muscle and we had to work to release it. I was out of the show for about a week.

There were two challenges: the physical challenge of getting my calf muscle back to normal, and the mental challenge. As a dancer, I was nervous about jumping on it again. So, I would compensate with my other leg. Our chiropractor did some manual therapy. I also had massage and physical therapy with strengthening exercises. I used a wobble board for proprioception, the Pilates jump board to jump without gravity and a trampoline to assist the jumping. It took a little while longer for my brain to readjust, gain confidence and not be nervous about it.

Can you share your health and wellness philosophy with us?

I believe in the whole mind-body-spirit connection. To have fulfillment in each of these areas is essential for growth and overall wellness.

- The spiritual aspect is the most important. I am a Christian and my faith in God is my foundation. It has changed my perspective on how I view and live life. This gives me peace, hope and security like

nothing else.

- The mind aspect encompasses my emotional side. Relationships are a priority. Because I am coming from a place of being content and fulfilled from my spiritual side, I can focus on loving and caring for others. I put my energy into having healthy, satisfying relationships with my husband, family and friends. Investing in others turns out to be a double blessing, because not only does it bless the ones you are investing in, but it also in turn blesses and fills you.
- The body aspect pertains to my physical health. Having a healthy body becomes an overflow of the other two. I want to take care of myself because I see it all as a gift, so that I can be there for the people I love, and of course, do the things I want to do, and have the career I have. As well as performing in the show, I exercise about five times a week, trying to have a balance between cardio and strength training. For me, that means taking Pilates for strengthening my whole body and yoga for flexibility and focusing my mind. I take different styles of dance class, from ballet to jazz, modern and hip-hop. I take aerobics classes like step and cardio kickboxing. Sometimes I even lift weights. Varying my routine and cross-training are very important to keep my mind interested and maintain balance in my body.
- In terms of diet, my philosophy is everything in moderation. I try to eat organically as much as possible and consume fewer processed foods. I eat a variety of vegetables, fruits, grains and proteins. I don't follow any extreme diets, like cutting out carbs or eating just protein. I also allow myself to have dessert. If I never allow myself the foods I crave, I'm sure I'll binge on them at some point. So, I allow all things in moderation and then I am satisfied.

It is no surprise that I am a dancer. When I dance, each part of the mind - body - spirit connection is being filled. That's why I am so passionate about it and chose it for my career.

Do you take vitamins, herbs or other supplements?

I take liquid potassium, glucosamine, chondritin, omega-3 essential fatty acids and a multivitamin. Before the show, I'll take Emergen-C or Airborne as a little pick me up if I need it. I also believe in drinking lots of water and getting plenty of rest. Sometimes we push ourselves so much, we don't listen to our bodies and get the rest we need. If I need it, I'll even lie down and close my eyes at work on a break; it refreshes me.

There are thousands of people watching your show every night. What advice do you have for someone who wants to follow in your footsteps and be a dancer, performer or artist?

Commit to training and be versatile. More versatility means more opportunity. Research your auditions. One time, I auditioned for a musical chorus. Unexpectedly, I was asked to read for the leading role. I had never seen the musical! Needless to say, I blew it. It was a valuable lesson though. You never know what can happen, so always be prepared!

The dance/entertainment field is difficult because there's a lot of discrimination; you are chosen often for your looks, height, gender, race or weight rather than just your ability. Those factors don't play a role in most other fields. Know there are some things you can change, and some things you can't change. Try not to take it personally.

I'm a firm believer in perseverance. There's a place for everyone. You must have faith, get past your fear and go for it. You may get a lot of *no*'s in this career, but I always felt that every *no* would get me closer to a *yes*. My mom always told me "no regrets." You just have to go through that door and if they say *no*, then you know and can move on. There's no looking back on your life and saying, "I wonder what would've happened if I had only tried."

Now that the show is coming to an end, what does that mean for you?

This job has been an unbelievable privilege and blessing. Celine Dion is an amazing woman to work for. I've been in a lot of shows and by far, this job has surpassed them in terms of how we're treated, the health services we receive, the schedule and the benefits. For example, in the dance world, you often don't get health insurance or dental insurance. They really take care of us here.

The "feeling" we have here is so unique. We've known each other for about five years now. We all trained in Belgium together - without our families and friends; it was just us. So we really bonded as a family. When the show closes, it's going to be difficult. Everyone will scatter to different parts of the world to find work. I'm married and closer to the end of my career. I may do more dance jobs, but I'll eventually transition to having a family. I'll see what God has planned for me. I believe dance will always be part of my life, but I am open to His will and I have faith ... if it happens, it happens.

What would you say to people who are thinking about improving their health and lifestyle?

When it comes to your physical health, commit to making one positive change. Whether it's through diet, exercise, rest, quitting smoking, etc., pick one thing to change, so you are not overwhelmed. Then truly commit. I believe once you start seeing and/or feeling the positive results of treating your body well, it will

motivate you to make more positive changes.

Realize though, that for a change to last, it has to be a lifestyle change - so make changes based on your interests and personal tastes. For example, if you need to get more exercise and you love nature, hiking and biking outdoors may be easier than committing to an aerobics class.

On the other hand, experiment! Be adventurous and try new activities. You may find you have hidden talents in new, unexpected areas. Also, if you find a certain activity isn't for you, don't just give up on exercise altogether. There are so many other things you can do to improve your fitness level, whether it's gardening outside, taking a walk or ballroom dancing. Try new foods and healthy recipes. You may discover interesting ways to add more fruits, vegetables and nutrients to your diet. As you continue to work toward a mind-body-spirit connection and find fulfillment in each area, you will discover a true sense of wellness in your life.

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