

# BENEFITS OF CAPOEIRA

## EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

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**Philosophical:** Making members of the group aware of the fundamentals of capoeira.

**Social:** Bringing home to the group as a whole the rights, responsibilities and duties of its members.

**Physical:** Mastery of the bodily movements involved in capoeira, within physical limits compatible with each practitioner's age and experience.

**Artistic:** Esthetic aspects of capoeira music, its songs, the playing and rhythms of its instruments, the berimbau, conga drums, tambourine and agogô bells, and its related dance and circle ceremony performance rituals.

There is no *single* standard or recipe for teaching capoeira, but rather, a number of different approaches, customized by different mestres. These mestres have empowerment within their academies or groups, but are nevertheless bound by traditions handed down by the individual mestres under whom they trained. All efforts involving the cognitive and affective processes involved in learning capoeira converge on a teaching system in which everybody learns. An example of this learning experience can be seen in the *rodas*, circle ceremonies in which the students make up new moves or improvise new songs as variations on a common theme aligned with capoeira's collective unconscious. This is teaching quite disconnected from any formal educational system, and bound up instead with a culture, the culture of capoeira Angola.

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CARYSE



# PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

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Capoeira is a physical activity involving performance exercises, for it requires continuous and rhythmic bodily motion engaging many groups of muscles. As muscular exercise, it is both isotonic and isometric, and demands intense physical effort.

Capoeira, like any other form of exercise, has cardiovascular, pulmonary and muscular physiological effects. We should recognize that many factors besides age and sex influence responses to exercise, factors such as posture, muscle mass involved in the effort, the exercise environment, proper hydration and individual fitness.

The physical qualities which capoeira develops are flexibility, strength, endurance, speed, balance, agility and coordination.

Practicing capoeira is an excellent way of acquiring flexibility. This is because the extra effort required of muscles and joints for effective performance, that is, to maximize the movements involved, reward the capoeirista with elegance of movement.

Capoeira is also a satisfactory means of achieving muscular strength. The entire weight of the body must be supported in various positions by the neck and limbs. Because it is a martial style, it incorporates attack and counterattack moves, leaping and dodging, and using one's own endurance against the adversary. Strength is also developed by practicing leaps and hops, freezes balancing on the hands, and constant motion, whether in ground or upright techniques.

Capoeira builds up endurance in circle bouts and through regular training. Training develops specific endurance, that is, good command of technical skills, with intense movement during sports practice. In the circle or *roda*, a practitioner must also have overall endurance, which takes account of physical conditioning and coordination. Endurance is an essential requirement for a capoeirista to be able to keep up the continuous motion necessary to demonstrate mastery of the techniques.

Capoeira often demands a certain speed or quickness of movement, of the body, arms or legs (strikes, attacks), or reaction (counterattacks, fending or dodging), in which reflexes and nimble cunning are developed. These are noncyclical, non-uniform movements, with varying rates of acceleration.

Another physical quality this sport develops is balance. During a capoeira bout a participant is often required to balance awhile on one foot, on the hands, or even a single hand – often with both feet in the air. Balance is intensely cultivated in movements such as the *au*<sup>1</sup> (cartwheel) or *bananeira*<sup>2</sup> (handstand), to give but two examples; or such striking techniques as the *martelo*<sup>3</sup> (roundhouse kick), *benção*<sup>4</sup> (front push kick) and *ponteira*<sup>5</sup> (front snap kick).

Capoeira is tightly bound up with agility. In actual contest a practitioner must take into account the unpredictability of blows, and be agile enough to defend, attack, dodge, feint and move in tempo with dexterous quickness. Being quick on your feet enables you to apply techniques



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- (1) A cartwheel, in which the capoeirista moves from a position resembling the letter "A" a figure formed by standing with legs apart, to a letter "U" with both legs in the air before completing the movement, back on the feet.
- (2) An upright handstand, with all weight resting on the arms, body upside down.
- (3) A roundhouse kick with the top of the foot striking the adversary's body or face.
- (4) A front push kick, in which the capoeirista raises a leg and pushes forward, causing the adversary to lose balance.
- (5) A front snap kick, striking the adversary with the ball of the foot.



tension and anxiety, and lessens the risk of depression and stress.

The psychophysiology of capoeira is, on the other hand, less familiar to the lay public.

Psychology may be described as the science that studies behavior and emotions, and physiology the study of how muscles produce movement. Hence, psychophysiology concerns itself with the emotional and behavioral changes an individual experiences when engaging in physical activity. The focus here is on the interaction between motor activity and emotions.

Taking the basic step of the 'ginga' as an example, let's apply this same concept to the world of capoeira. Shifting the weight from leg to leg in rhythm makes the practitioner feel loosened up and flexible. These are positive feelings that help to improve one's behavior in day-to-day activities, in relating to friends, in decisionmaking at work, school, etc. Exercise brings people face-to-face with the limitations of their body, making them more aware not only of the physical self, but the inner self as well – which improves one's ability to perform.

We see, then, why any type of exercise, not just capoeira, may improve quality of life or cure certain ailments such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, fibromyalgia, and stress, for the energy used in producing the movement causes the brain to release neurotransmitters such as endorphin, adrenaline and nor-adrenaline into the body; these are chemicals that produce a sense of well-being.

Capoeira, in common with other martial arts, does more than just strengthen muscles. It makes a person feel mentally and emotionally stronger. One thing that sets capoeira apart from other martial styles is its inclusion of movements that resemble dance movements, complete with rhythm and music – all of which makes the individual feel freer and more secure. There are no rigid movements involved, but rather, sweeping movements, some of them ludic or playful, giving people an opportunity to work out things that bother them while reinforcing the positive – the realization that they are capable of daily improvement.

as opportunities emerge, and dodge an adversary's blows quickly enough to escape. Fast play, determined by the speed and rhythm of playing on the musical bow or *berimbau*, demands of the players fast combinations of successive moves executed in several directions with considerable quickness. All of this requires a high degree of coordination, and develops agility, dexterity and speed all at once.

Last but not least, the development of coordination is also very important to anyone practicing capoeira. Inasmuch as it is characterized by style, lightness, ease of motion and performance, coordination is cultivated and improved with practice. Capoeira adepts rely on dexterity and creativity, rather than choreographed patterns, all of which demands highly developed reflexes and coordination of movements.

**Capoeira and Psychological Development.** That exercise brings psychological and emotional benefits is common knowledge, for it relaxes the body and stimulates the mind, betters the mood and increases self-esteem, reduces

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