

# It's never too late to...

pole dance

It may have a seedy reputation, but for **Janet Bowden**, 61, pole dancing classes have banished her joint pains and given her body confidence a boost

**P**ole dancing has a certain notoriety – people tend to associate it with stripping. But actually it's an internationally recognised sport. You need a huge amount of strength to climb a pole and hang off it with one hand or one leg. I started in 2019, when I was 58. As the managing director of a print solutions company, I had dedicated my life to my work, and realised I didn't have any hobbies. After reading an article about pole fitness, I resolved to give it a go, and booked a series of classes.

My first visit was daunting, especially as I was the eldest in the class. We started with a warm-up and some basic spins. My attempt was more clumsy than elegant – I thought, 'Gosh, this is harder than it looks'. But there were younger girls who were finding it more difficult than me. It feels naughty to say, but I was encouraged by the fact I wasn't the worst there.

We were all new, so the camaraderie was amazing. I work with mostly men, so it felt special to be part of such a supportive group of women. When the studio closed over lockdown, I had a pole installed at home. But I missed that community – practising alone isn't the same.

Now, I go to classes three times a week. There is always a new move to master and it's so satisfying when you can tick off another one. That sense of achievement is the best part for me. I've accomplished positions I never thought I could manage and can't wait to keep learning.

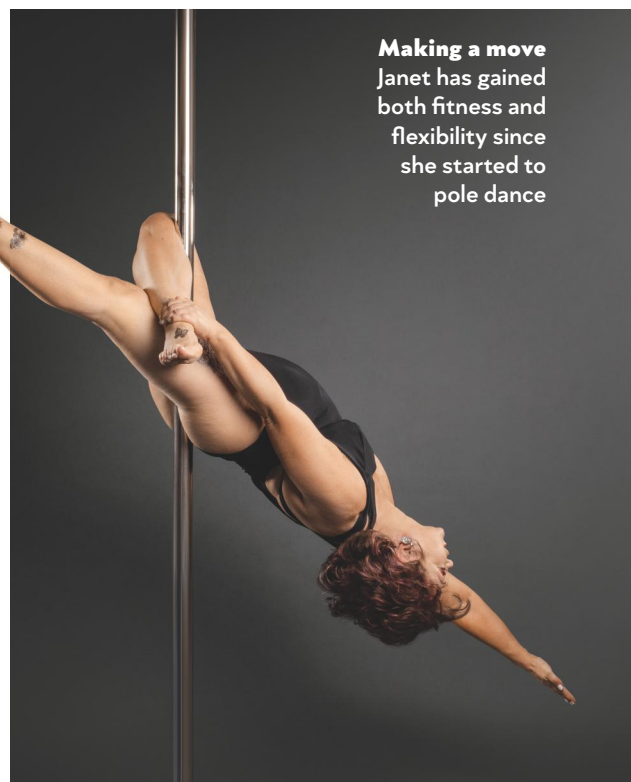
Pole wear looks like swimwear. You can't cover up too much as your skin needs to be exposed to grip the pole. We women are often critical of our bodies, so while stripping down in your sixties might sound alarming, I've found it liberating. I don't feel uncomfortable – everyone is focused on themselves, nobody is judging you.

It has changed my life in many ways. I used to have aches in my joints, but pole dancing has banished this soreness. I have the odd bruise

from gripping too hard – 'pole kisses' – but I've lost weight and gained flexibility, so my body confidence has soared.

My 83-year-old mum, Dorothy, is very proud. She

**'While stripping down in your sixties might sound alarming, I've found it liberating'**



**Making a move**  
Janet has gained both fitness and flexibility since she started to pole dance

shows everyone photos of me trying out moves and even has a picture of me wrapped around a pole as her phone screensaver. I'm hoping to perfect a move called the Dorothy so she can have a photo of me performing her namesake.

Now, when I'm in the studio, I never think I'm the oldest person in the room. I keep up with everyone and I love what I'm doing – nothing else matters. Younger classmates say, 'I hope I'm like you when I'm older', which is lovely. No one should be deterred from trying something that excites them just because of their age. ❀



## **JANET'S TIPS FOR BEGINNERS**

- ❀ Join a beginners' class. You won't want to be with people who have been doing it for six months because you'll get disheartened.
- ❀ If you're too shy for a group lesson, you could try a private lesson. These are more expensive, but you'll progress faster.
- ❀ There's no need to purchase any fancy pole wear yet. A pair of loose shorts and a vest top will do fine. The more skin on show, the better your grip will be.