



# The Impact of Dance Therapy on the Rehabilitation of Anxiety Disorder Patients

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**Abstract:** Patients with anxiety disorders often exhibit excessive worry about future events, psychological and physical anxiety symptoms, and autonomic nervous dysfunction. They may also experience depressive moods and lose interest in daily activities. Dance therapy, which uses physical movement to express deep negative emotions, can improve sleep quality, enhance overall mood, activate multiple brain regions, and increase the content of brain-derived neurotrophic factors. This paper analyzes the relevant symptoms of anxiety disorder patients and explores the application and therapeutic factors of dance therapy in alleviating anxiety. During dance therapy, patients release hidden emotions through movement, gaining a deeper understanding of their inner world and boosting their self-confidence.

**Keywords:** dance therapy; anxiety disorder patients; physical movement; mood improvement

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## 1. Introduction

Anxiety disorder is one of the most common mental disorders in modern society. Patients often exhibit excessive worry about future possible events and anxiety about various issues in their daily lives. The persistent anxious state affects the mental aspect of patients and can lead to a series of physical anxiety symptoms and autonomic nervous dysfunction. Research shows that dance therapy helps improve physical discomfort symptoms in anxiety disorder patients [1]. Dance therapy has significant therapeutic effects in alleviating anxiety disorder symptoms, improving factors such as body image, rhythm, and symbolism, and effectively managing anxiety.

## 2. Analysis of Relevant Symptoms in Anxiety Disorder Patients

While the anxious state affects the mental aspect, it can also trigger a series of physical anxiety symptoms and autonomic nervous dysfunction. Patients may experience psychological anxiety symptoms such as excessive worry and tension in daily life. They overreact to sudden stimuli, often displaying startle responses. Patients often struggle to concentrate, suffer from memory loss, experience slow thinking, and have sluggish reactions. Their emotions may be unstable, with frequent irritability and anger over trivial matters. As the condition progresses, patients may develop physical anxiety symptoms such as fidgeting, foot-tapping, and other purposeless movements. They find it difficult to remain still and frequently need to walk around or change positions. Muscle tension and discomfort are common, sometimes accompanied by soreness or stiffness. Due to prolonged tension and stress, patients may experience tension headaches and sometimes exhibit tremors or shaking in their limbs. Symptoms of autonomic nervous dysfunction are also apparent, including rapid heartbeat and palpitations. Patients often feel chest tightness, shortness of breath, and difficulty breathing. Abnormal sweating, such as excessive perspiration in the palms or forehead, is common. Reduced saliva secretion due to anxiety leads to dry mouth. Anxiety disorder patients may also exhibit depressive symptoms, such as low mood and loss of interest. They lose enthusiasm for daily activities and hobbies and lack motivation to participate in activities [2].

## 3. Implementation Effectiveness of Dance Therapy in the Rehabilitation of Anxiety Disorder Patients

Dance therapy is a non-verbal therapeutic method that allows patients to express deep negative emotions through physical movement, avoiding the discomfort of directly verbalizing their inner struggles. This non-verbal mode of expression enables patients to release their inner frustration, sadness, and resentment without exposing psychological trauma. In times of psychological conflict, dance therapy helps patients gain a deeper understanding of their inner world. Dance therapy activities can boost patients' self-confidence, enabling them to confidently face life's challenges. During dance relaxation training, patients can release repressed rational emotions, improving their anxious mental state [3].

## **4. Implementation Strategies of Dance Therapy for Anxiety Disorder Patients**

### **4.1 Group Dance Activities**

In the implementation of dance therapy, sessions are held three times a week, each lasting about 60 minutes. The sessions are conducted by a professionally qualified mental health rehabilitation therapist. At the beginning of each session, the therapist enthusiastically introduces each member, encouraging them to introduce themselves to break the initial awkwardness and promote mutual understanding among the members. Through friendly interactions, the group eliminates the sense of unfamiliarity between the participants. Group dance activities are conducted, with members holding hands and forming a circle. Suitable warm-up music is selected, and the therapist guides the members to move in rhythm with the music, performing physical warm-ups to stimulate the members' enthusiasm [4].

### **4.2 Dance and Relaxation Exercises**

The therapist provides emotional support for the patients and demonstrates the dance movements to inspire their participation. The therapist analyzes the patients' movements to gain insight into their emotional states and uncover their underlying psychological needs. Choreographers design movement sequences based on the specific needs of the patients, guiding them to achieve certain emotional responses and experience the emotional changes within the dance. During the therapy, patients learn to effectively relax both their bodies and minds.

In the tightening phase, patients start from their toes, tightening the muscles in their feet, calves, hips, shoulders, feet, ankles, thighs, waist, neck, and other areas. While tightening, patients maintain deep breathing, feeling the strength of their muscles. In the relaxation phase, after tightening, patients gradually release the muscles in the above areas. During relaxation, patients gently sway their bodies and limbs, further releasing tension. They continue deep breathing and experience the comfort of relaxation. Patients follow the process of relaxing each part of their body from bottom to top. The therapist offers appropriate guidance, assisting the patients in experiencing the relaxation process [5].

### **4.3 Emotional Release through Dance**

In the third phase of dance therapy—emotional release through movement—the therapist guides patients to move freely to background music, courageously expressing their true inner feelings. The therapist uses the background music to stimulate the patients' desire for improvised dance. During the therapy, the therapist closely observes the patients' movements, capturing emotional changes. Through questioning and guidance, the therapist encourages patients to explore their inner world more deeply, helping them express their true feelings. Accompanied by music, patients delve into their anxiety, discover the underlying causes of their anxious emotions, and uncover the constraints they wish to break free from. This process helps them release emotional constraints and feel a sense of liberation in life.

## **5. Mechanisms of Dance Therapy in Alleviating Anxiety Emotions**

### **5.1 Improving Body Image of Patients**

Anxiety often manifests in an individual's body posture, presenting as muscle tension and a sense of restriction, which limits cognitive flexibility and weakens creativity. Therefore, changing body image is crucial for alleviating anxiety. Dance therapy encourages individuals to engage in real physical movements, gradually restoring their bodily energy. During dance, individuals can reshape their body image, activating mental vitality. In particular, women with low self-assessment of their body image are more prone to depression and anxiety [6]. In group dance therapy, individuals can feel supported by the team and develop a sense of control over their bodies. The therapist designs rhythmic and fluid dance movements that help patients move in time with the music, allowing them to appreciate the beauty of their bodies and boost positive emotions. Through repeated dance experiences, patients gradually form a positive view of their bodies and improve their self-image. As patients experience various body movements and rhythms, they create deep memories that, when triggered in daily life, help alleviate anxiety by stimulating coping mechanisms.

### **5.2 Regulating the Body Rhythm of Patients**

In dance therapy, the therapist uses rhythm to guide the patient's movements. Through rhythmic music and breathing exercises, patients can gradually relax, releasing internal stress. The therapist encourages patients to express their emotions through dance, creating a pleasurable experience based on the body's rhythm. Empathy and other behaviors in a rhythmic environment can stimulate the release of oxytocin, further reducing anxiety. This is why music therapy is widely used in the treatment of anxiety disorders, with proven effectiveness [7]. Rhythm-based body movement therapy helps regulate the anxious physical rhythm of patients, shifting them from a tense, high-frequency state to a relaxed, low-frequency state. Various

rhythmic movements, such as flowing, staccato, chaotic, lyrical, and stillness, can help clear the mind and allow the body to “tell a story,” ultimately releasing pressure through dance. Dance therapy improves body coordination and has a positive effect on relieving anxiety. During the dance process, patients can enhance their physical fitness and improve their ability to cope with stress. Group dancing also fosters understanding and trust, creating emotional connections that soothe feelings and establish a therapeutic movement relationship. Through dance, patients can release suppressed emotions such as anger and disappointment, reducing emotional burdens.

### 5.3 Relieving Anxiety through Movement Metaphors

Body movements are an outward expression of unconscious psychological activities. People can express their emotions, needs, and struggles through various actions. In dance therapy, the therapist guides patients to use body movements to express their inner feelings. Dance therapy allows patients to release their anxiety through their movements, enabling them to freely express their emotions. When patients use dance to release anxiety, their emotional state improves, and their sense of anxiety is alleviated. Throughout the therapy, patients become more aware of their body movements, which enhances self-awareness and promotes self-acceptance. This process of self-recognition helps patients understand the origins of their anxiety and find effective ways to cope with it. Dance therapy guides patients to build positive, forward-thinking body memories, changing negative perceptions of their bodies and enabling them to stay calm in the face of anxiety, thus improving their coping abilities. Symbols in dance therapy combine what is seen and felt, rooted in dreams and expressed in creative movements. Symbolic expressions in dance therapy connect the client’s inner world with external reality, helping individuals find order in chaotic emotions. Symbolic healing can take place both in individual and group creative processes. Familiar objects can build a connection between the individual and the outside world, allowing for safe interactions and helping alleviate anxiety through movement metaphors. Transitional objects facilitate balance between the individual and their environment, promoting anxiety relief.

## 6. Conclusion

Anxiety disorders are common psychological conditions that adversely affect patients’ quality of life and mental health, leading to excessive worry and a range of somatic anxiety symptoms and autonomic nervous system dysfunction. Patients often exhibit excessive worry, nervousness, and overreactions to sudden stimuli in their daily lives. Dance therapy, a non-verbal therapeutic approach, offers a new treatment avenue for patients with anxiety disorders. Through physical movements, patients can express their deep-seated negative emotions, avoiding the discomfort of verbalizing their issues. During the dance process, patients are able to release emotions that cannot be articulated through language, reduce stress, eliminate negative thoughts, improve sleep quality, and enhance their overall emotional state. Studies show that dance therapy activates multiple brain areas, improves brain function, increases brain-derived neurotrophic factor levels, enhances patients’ self-awareness, and has a comprehensive positive effect on their condition.

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