



Many people get into flow arts because it's heaps of fun, and because spinning fire is one of the coolest things they've seen and they **have** to try it for themselves. Often, people don't realise that flow arts is something that can positively impact their lives in a multitude of ways.

Not only is flow fun but it's incredibly good for you with tons of physical and psychological benefits. This article will dive in to see just how beneficial flow is, why flow makes us happy, and how flow can improve mental health.

You'll often hear flow arts being referred to as 'moving meditation'. Like its cousins, tai chi and yoga, flow is a mind-body activity. When you spin, you not only train your body and develop your physical abilities, but you also focus and strengthen your mind.

## Physical Benefits

Lack of physical exercise is a global concern which plays a massive part in avoidable health issues like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression.

Spinning poi, staff, rope dart, dragon staff - and any other flow prop you can think of - is a really good workout. Because flow is enjoyable and feels like play, not like 'traditional' exercise, you're more likely to do it. This means you'll reap all the benefits of regular exercise without *really* exercising (or at least it won't feel like it!).

Most props will naturally work your upper body (we primarily use our hands/arms to manipulate them) and it's pretty easy to throw in some leg work too – just think of it like dancing and your prop is your dance partner – making a flow session an excellent full body workout, building muscle strength and control. Regularly working out and moving your body leads to an increase in fitness levels, which ultimately means an increase in overall energy levels too.

Many of us will know someone who is 'clumsy' or 'accident prone'. Y'know, that one person who always runs into things, trips up on things... Yeah, you know who I'm talking about. Somebody get them a flow toy STAT!

Flow improves body awareness, balance, and can even improve perception. Your prop becomes an extension of you. When you spin, you need to know exactly where your body parts are and where the prop is in relation to those parts so you can nail that move without nailing yourself in the face.



When we spin, we take in every detail in order to achieve our goal (in this case, executing a move without smashing ourselves with our prop) and this attention to detail is subconsciously enhanced which leads to us noticing more of the fine print even when we're not spinning.

Playing with our props not only improves our gross motor skills (movements using our arms, legs, and full body) but it also improves our fine motor skills and our hand eye coordination. Dexterity, or the use of our hands, can be given a boost with such techniques as finger spinning.

In 2018, Dr. Kate Riegle van West completed her PhD on the health benefits of poi at the University of Auckland. She carried out the first study to scientifically investigate the effects of poi on physical and cognitive function, and is now the founder and CEO of [SpinPoi](#) – a social enterprise that works with poi to improve health and wellbeing for all ages and across all abilities. The results of this study showed that all participants (aged 60-86 years) exhibited improved balance, grip strength, and attention. You can read more about the study [here](#).

Flow gives us a healthy outlet for our energy, whether it's happy, excited energy, or angry, stressed energy, flow gives us somewhere to expel that energy in a positive and productive way. It provides us with an opportunity to explore and interact with the physical world as we discover the endless possibilities of what we can do with our prop.

## Flow State

When talking about flow, it's near impossible to discuss anything without mentioning flow state, and the man who coined the term, [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) (pronounced Me-hi Chic-sent-me-hi). Mihaly was a leading researcher in positive psychology and literally wrote the book on flow - [Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience](#).

### ***But what does it mean to be in a flow state?***

According to Mihaly, flow state, otherwise known as being 'in the zone', is when you are so focused on the task at hand, purely for the enjoyment of it (rather than an external outcome or reward gained from completing the task) and your attention is so completely on that task, everything else just fades away. All thoughts, feelings, senses, and intentions are focused on the same goal.



Mihaly believed that creativity is a central source of meaning in life. As we get older, and the responsibilities of adulthood pile up, we often lose our creative exploration. Flow arts provides us with an avenue to bring that back into our lives, and with the variety of props available, there is something to suit everyone.

## Psychological Benefits

While flow arts is a sport, unlike traditional sports there is no competitive angle. We spin for the richness of the experience, we spin as a way to express ourselves, and we spin to achieve a personal best rather than to best another person.

One of the greatest things about flow is the instant feedback it provides. The combination of immediate negative feedback (usually pain from smacking ourselves with our prop) and immediate positive gratification (successfully nailing a move) allows us to improve our skills quickly, which gives us a sense of achievement and a boost to our self-esteem. This then leads us to think 'what else can I achieve?'

While flow does give us that instant feedback and rapid improvement, it still requires dedication, discipline, persistence, and willpower. It's not a common response to keep swinging the thing that just smacked you in the face 10 times in the last two minutes, but we do it because we know that if we don't keep trying, we'll never ace that move.

Flow arts provides us with an opportunity to find that perfect balance between challenge and skill and to keep improving through persistence, patience, and practice. This persistence through flow helps us gain confidence and develop our ability to handle challenging situations, and to push through difficult mindsets in other areas of our lives.



Flow also improves focus, concentration, and alertness. You need to pay attention to the prop and how you must influence it to create the desired effect. You need to be aware of where the prop is, and where it's going next so you don't injure yourself, those around you, or damage anything in your surrounding area (you should always try to spin with plenty of space to minimise the risk of damage and/or injury). By focusing our minds when we spin, we are training our brains to do this outside of spinning too.

In a world where almost everything is instant, many people fall short when it comes to patience. Flow helps us to become more patient: we won't always get a new move instantly, we must be patient while we train; if we get injured, we must wait to spin again (otherwise

we risk more or worse injury); we must relearn ideas from the beginning (once we have learned how to do something with our dominant side, we must drill our non-dominant side). It helps us to forgive our failures and to create plans for overcoming obstacles in the future.

## Sense of Community

Something you'll hear almost every flowmie say is how amazing the flow community is. Flow provides us with an opportunity to connect with others, something that is important for us humans, and something that gets more difficult as we get older – it's easy to make friends as a kid, not so much as an adult!

The flow community is incredibly inclusive, so regardless of your hair or skin colour, your style, your accent, your gender or sexual identity, you will often find a sense of belonging in the flow community that's difficult to find elsewhere.



The social aspect of flow provides us with an opportunity to learn how to work well with others, especially with those who may have differing world views as ourselves. It gives us the chance to collaborate, to learn how to compromise, and to build our social negotiation skills. These are all skills that are extremely valuable in the 'real' world and can help us to become more exceptional versions of ourselves.