

FOREVER ACTIVE

PERSONALIZED FITNESS AND WELLNESS FOR MEN 50 +

Pilates

Introduction

Pilates, like Yoga, has become a very popular form of “non-traditional” exercise over the last 10 years. Pilates studios are popping up all over the place and even the traditional fitness gyms are offering Pilates class as a way of attracting and retaining clientele. However, many people are still unaware of what Pilates is, its principles, how it is practised and the benefits that can be achieved through constant participation. This newsletter will answer those questions and explain why Pilates should become part of everyone's exercise routine, especially for the older adult.

What is Pilates

Pilates is a physical fitness system developed in the early 20th century by German-born Joseph Pilates who described his method as the art of controlled movements. If practiced with consistency, Pilates will improve flexibility, muscle strength, endurance, and motor control in the whole human body. It puts emphasis on developing a strong core, body alignment, coordination and balance. Pilates' system allows for different exercises to be modified in a range of difficulty and intensity from beginning to advanced as the body conditions and adapts to the exercises. At first, to the beginner, Pilates may seem easy and that it does not produce a good work out. However, as your proficiency in performing the exercises improves, Pilates gets harder and harder. As your body changes and your skills increase, your ability to work with precision and at a higher intensity will change the nature of each exercise. It is said that there are no plateaus in Pilates. Pilates can be safely and successfully used for post-injury rehabilitation, post pregnancy conditioning, to serve as a safe environment to begin an exercise program for the older adult, and to enhance athletic abilities, especially in sports that require higher levels of muscle control, balance and coordination such as dance, gymnastics and figure skating.

The Core/ The Powerhouse

Students are taught that by strengthening and learning to use their core properly when performing their Pilates movements, they will learn to use their core or “powerhouse” throughout life's daily activities. According to Pilates Principles, the powerhouse is the centre of the body and if strengthened, it offers a solid foundation for any movement.

The Powerhouse is activated effectively by contracting the abdominals, by drawing the navel back into the spine in a zipping-up motion, from the pubic bone to the breast bone.



Did You Know

Mat and Reformer Exercises

Mat and reformer are the two most common types of Pilates classes that people begin with. Either one will be beneficial for developing strength, endurance, balance and coordination.

Mat and the Magic Circle

A Pilates mat class is comprised of exercises done on a mat on the floor, without the need for any special equipment. However, smaller pieces of Pilates equipment, such as the magic circle or exercise band, may be incorporated into a mat class. Mat classes offer the benefit of teaching exercises that can easily be practiced at home.



Reformer

The Pilates reformer, sometimes known as a Pilates machine, is a large piece of exercise equipment. A combination of springs set at different tensions, and a student's own body weight, create resistance during the exercises. The resistance that the reformer provides adds a weight bearing component to the reformer workout, beyond what the mat exercises offer.



Six Principles of Pilates

1. Concentration

Pilates demands intense focus. It is important to concentrate on your entire body for controlled smooth movements because, in Pilates, the way that the exercises are done is more important than the exercises themselves.

2. Control

"Contrology" was Joseph Pilates preferred name for his method and it is based on the idea of muscle control. All exercises are done with control. The muscles work under control to lift against gravity and the resistance of the springs. Unlike other resistance type exercises, in Pilates, there are no ballistic or explosive type movements.

3. Centering

This principle is based on the concept that to control the movement of your body you must have a strong centre or core. The centre/core is the focal point of the Pilates Method. The group of muscles in the center of the body, the core, are the abdomen, lower and upper back, hips, buttocks, and inner thighs. This group of muscles are often referred to in Pilates as the "powerhouse". It is important that all exercises or movements in Pilates begin from the centre and flow outward to the limbs.

4. Flow or efficiency of movement

Pilates aims for efficiency of movement by creating flow through the use of appropriate transitions from one exercise to another. This helps build muscular strength, endurance, motor control, balance and coordination.

5. Precision

Precision is essential to correct Pilates. The focus is on doing one precise and perfect movement and then transitioning to the next.

6. Breathing

Proper breathing is important in the Pilates method: full inhalation and complete exhalation. The Pilates breathing technique is described as posterior lateral breathing, meaning that as you perform an exercise movement you are instructed to breathe deep into the back and sides of your rib cage. It is important to properly coordinate your breathing with each movement.

Summary

Pilates is an excellent way to introduce non-ballistic exercises into an individual's exercise routine. Its focus on improved flexibility, core strengthening, whole body muscle toning, balance and coordination makes it an excellent form of exercise for the older adult.

4 Essential Pilate Mat Exercises

1. Hundreds

1. Lie on your back with feet off the floor and your knees bent 90°
2. Bring your head up with your chin tucked in and, using your abdominal muscles, curl your upper spine up so shoulder blades are off the floor.
3. Lift your arms and straighten your legs off the floor.
4. Hold your position and take five short breaths in and five short breaths out (like sniffing in and puffing out). While doing so, move your arms in a controlled up and down manner - a small but dynamic pumping of the arms. Do a cycle of 10 full breaths.
5. Each cycle is five short in-breaths and five out-breaths.



2. Leg Circle

1. Lie on the floor and pull your abdominals in, anchoring the pelvis and shoulders to the floor.
2. Extend one leg toward the ceiling and the other leg is bent at the knee.
3. Do a circular motion with the extended leg. Pelvis and shoulders stay level on the floor.



3. Single Leg Stretch

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your shins parallel to the floor (Table top position)
2. Pull your abs in, by pulling your bellybutton down toward your spine, as you curl your head and shoulders blades off the floor. As you curl up, your left leg extends straight and is lifted at a 45-degree angle. The right leg remains in tabletop position with the right hand grasping the right ankle and the left hand moving to the right knee.
3. Alternate legs



4. Roll Up

1. Lie on the floor with your legs straight arms over your head
2. Lift your arms up toward the ceiling. Continue in one smooth motion to curl your body in an "up and over" motion toward your toes. Ideally the legs are kept straight throughout this exercise. A modification would be to allow the legs to bend, especially as you come up and reach toward the toes.

