

■ Tips that will keep you on top

Why Pilates Principles Work

Know your options

By Dr. Howard S. Sichel

Pilates is a uniquely transformational method of body conditioning that yields profound results for people of all ages and abilities. Equally engaging your body and mind, the Pilates method emphasizes the uniform development of all muscle groups while promoting flexibility, circulation and skeletal alignment. This development occurs once the initiation of movement comes from the core. When speaking of the core musculature, we designate the abdominals as the main focus with attention being paid to the back and upper leg musculature as well. The ability to initiate movement from the abdominals while releasing the back musculature will create the desired result. The Pilates process of stretching and strengthening in a precise natural rhythm, with the body in stabilized positions, allows for a lengthening in the torso that is important in dealing with chronic injuries. This unique method focuses on the quality of each movement and involves the six basic principles of stabilization, control, flow, concentration, breath and full range of movement. Within a few sessions, you will experience a resurgence of energy and self-confidence as your body and mind return to a natural state of balance. You will learn to move more freely, with grace and authority, and be well on your way to a leaner, longer and stronger body.

Pilates, when taught in its classical format, has been used as an adjunct to clinical chiropractic practice as well as physical therapy programs. What has been apparent in clinical work is the need for a rehabilitative adjunct to support the work being done with patients. Most chronic patients present very similar weaknesses. Symptoms may vary, but the underlying cause of these compensatory symptoms are usually the same. Patients create, in their bodies, ways to deal with life's physical and emotional stresses. The result being significant compensatory changes in their bodies, most notably in the spine, torso and posture. These changes resulted in imbalances in musculoskeletal

structure and function. Clients present lower back compression, tightness and weakness in the supporting musculature as well as weakness in the abdominal and core musculature. This creates significant distortion in the lumbar-pelvic girdle, usually anterior in alignment. When left untreated, the resulting picture of this individual is the same; poor posture, weak core musculature, tightness in protective musculature and restriction of movement in the joints, poor flexibility and premature degeneration of the spine. These symptoms are the most significant components to the loss of quality of life that most people suffer. The loss of the ability to enjoy a pain-free life affects our entire society.

Clinical work reveals most patients present these same distortions. Through the use of classical Pilates, these patients symptoms diminish, and their postural distortion as well as their muscular weaknesses improve. As a result of restoring the connection to their core, the health of these patients was restored, chronic pain diminished as well as symptomatic relief of what was thought to be unrelated conditions.

Whether people suffer from lower back dysfunction including disc, sciatic, S-1 strains and sprains or hip dysfunction as well as thoracic and cervical involvement, the protocol was the same; get them moving in a Pilates systematic integrated approach.

Utilizing a classical style of Pilates training, whether with equipment or just the floor (Mat) work, the weaknesses outlined above will be addressed. This integrative, systematic approach allows clients to work in a beginner system, making the necessary connections in the core musculature thereby creating length in the spine and improving the musculoskeletal health.

Stabilization — Initiating movement from a stable source. Learn how to stabilize through opposition

Control — Initiating movement from its correct source, never losing the significance of the movement

Flow or Efficiency of Movement — Importance of transitional aspects within each exercise

Concentration — Performing the exercises with the correct mindful intent and the process of deepening awareness into the movement

Breathe — Understand the importance of exhalation to stimulate breathing, facilitate core support and intensify movement

FROM (Full Range of Motion) — FROM of a joint will change week to week and will promote healing and reduce the effects of some injuries

Pilates is a great tool to add to your repertoire of personal training. Incorporating these principles into your current training routines

will maximize results for your clients. Weight training with these principles allows your clients to improve quickly and help create that long, lean look that is the cornerstone of a healthy spine and torso. Once the connection is made, the development of muscular size through lifting can be accomplished in a healthy way. All aspects of aerobic fitness from step training to kickboxing can benefit from this style of training. The reduction of chronic weaknesses will enable clients to maximize their results and progress.

There are many Pilates training programs on the market today, some better than others. Before you start a Pilates training program, make sure you research the options, consult with the experts and ensure that your questions are being answered appropriately. What you should be signing up for, whether in training or equipment purchase, is a partner that will assist you in the development of a successful, safe, quality Pilates program.

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Pilates for Functional Training

What you need to know before teaching your clients By Leslee Bender

Pilates is becoming the fastest growing trend in fitness. Why? Because it works. Originally, developed for rehabilitation, the principles are really useful in everyday training. Both group fitness and personal trainers are learning the method for new and creative ways of helping their clients achieve new goals. Pilates definitely improves everything else we do because it improves core strength and flexibility. However, it is not the end of all means — one still needs to strength train and do cardio for a balanced program. Personal trainers and group fitness professionals understand this concept despite the false perception that Pilates will make you lose weight.

When trainers include Pilates into their programs of training, it enhances all other activities. For example, many of the professional athletes are using this form of training to strengthen their core stabilization muscles to help prevent injuries. Coaches as well as athletes are finally seeing the benefits of core stabilization and flexibility.

Pilates training focuses on what is known as the "Powerhouse," which includes the Transverse Abdominus, Rectus Abdominus, Internal and External Obliques, Erector Spinae, Multifidus, Quadratus Lumborum and Glutes. A research team at the University of Queensland, Australia, has focused its research on learning if an individual has a strong attention of the deep abdominal wall they should experience less back pain. When an individual lets the abdominals bulge during a sit up, essentially the Transverse Abdominus is no longer performing as it should. Unfortunately, students have learned the wrong way to do abdominal training for many years, focusing on incorrect biomechanics.



The challenge is teaching it the right way. With several videos and books on the shelves not offering modifications of Pilates abdominal training, individuals will find that they could possibly strain their lower backs. Therefore, one seeking Pilates training should hire a certified Pilates trainer before starting a program. Also, an individual should look to see the background of the personal trainer and see whether the trainer holds other certifications.

Many Pilates programs are taught by dancers who have a great awareness of their bodies. However, our clients do not always share that same awareness of their bodies. Therefore, modifications of an exercise are essential. It's not about performing, it's about teaching.

Three simple exercises that provide results:

1. The 100 — This exercise should be modified for all levels of students so they may have a choice
2. The half roll-up
3. Back and hip extension

All of these exercises focus on core stabilization training for results. By adding a small ball, a trainer can add modifications and variations to all of the exercises. Also, by adding breathing to the movements, the trainer can have the client focus on contraction of the Transverse Abdominus.

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Choosing a Pilates education program is critical to gaining the tools necessary to properly teach your clients.

Pilates-inspired work can also be utilized successfully in the personal training of clients. Pilates equipment isn't the only way to integrate this work into your client's regimen. I have worked with personal trainers on their approach to abdominal and back training and have identified the ways they could get more out of the time they spend with their clients. The abdominal musculature can be trained to function as we know they should. In movement, the abdominals should be trained to pull in and contract, not pop out and contract. By training the abs in this way, you are assisting in the creation of length in the lower back and releasing the tension in the lower back musculature. A very simple correction will yield a very powerful result.

Choosing a Pilates education program is critical to gaining the tools necessary to properly teach your clients the principles of classical Pilates work. The program should stress this classical integrative systematic approach with a concentration on the essentials of teaching. In the program, the exercise sequences and proper teaching skills will prepare the client for effective movement utilizing the desired musculature in a rigorous but controlled sequence of exercises. Integrative means the use of different pieces of equipment or different positions to challenge the client's body. We prefer to start clients in the horizontal position, where gravity is taken out of the mix and does not compress the spine. By doing this, the compensatory changes our bodies have gone through are relaxed and more receptive to change. As the connection is introduced in the core, clients

will progress to a seated position and end in a vertical one. Once this core connection can be sustained, further challenge is added either by specific exercises, angles of extremities or increased range of motion. Slowly, these compensatory weaknesses begin to diminish and proper function replaces them. Articulation of joints that have been restricted due to these compensatory weaknesses will begin to improve. Degeneration of these joints will actually reduce, allowing for a freedom of movement that most people had previously lost. The beauty of Pilates when it is taught in this style is that a client's weaknesses are revealed almost immediately, and with very little intentional correction from the teacher, these weaknesses are corrected in a movement/fitness setting where the client's body begins to transform from the core connection out to the rest of the body.

The critical component in Pilates teacher certification is to learn in this integrative, systematic approach with an emphasis on the essentials of teaching. This gives instructors the blueprint and script to follow and allows them to further their education through their teaching experiences.

There are six basic principles we utilize in our Power Pilates Certification programs. These are the foundation of all education in our trainings. Utilizing these principles in your teaching will allow clients to reach their maximum change in their body and the teacher to teach more effectively and effortlessly.