



“Not Only is Health a Normal Condition, but it is a Duty not Only to Attain it but to Maintain it” – Joseph Pilates

PILATES

The essential workout



Pilates can make a difference to everyone. **Laura Schembri** takes us through the scientific evidence, the main benefits and the eight principles of Pilates.

Pilates is the only exercise technique that works you from the inside out.

This is the method that develops the powerhouse of your core muscles. These wrap around your centre like an internal corset, supporting your spine and facilitating control during daily activities, such as bending or lifting.

It also focuses on breathing; you will develop better stamina, due to the increased uptake of oxygen in your blood whilst doing physical activity. The exercises are similar to those that you may do in another type of class, but here the focus is on quality of movement.

The first thing you need to learn is what constitutes good posture, and subsequently how to move and breathe whilst keeping

the spine stable. This ought to be the natural thing to do; but owing to ones' lifestyle, many people lose the automatic function of the core muscles. This may only be regained by re-education and improved body awareness.

Unlike other forms of exercise, it is essential that the Pilates Instructor be an expert in the analysis of muscle imbalance, and adept at correcting dysfunctional movement patterns at the same time as teaching the technique.

The scientific evidence has led to all the major categories of athletes, including Premier League football players and professional dancers, to using core stability and dynamic



8 Principles of Pilates:

1. **Concentration**- the onus is on fusing the mind-body connection so that body awareness is heightened and all other thoughts are put away.
2. **Breathing**-The muscles that support the spine need to work throughout movement and often lose their timing due to poor posture or prior injuries. This leads to loss of control during breathing which needs to be re-educated in order to prevent injuries occurring during daily activities.
3. **Centring**- Joseph Pilates believed that your centre is your 'powerhouse.' He used the core muscles to stabilise the spine, whilst carrying out progressively difficult exercises.
4. **Control**- like learning to drive a car, correct movement needs to be re-educated until it becomes automatic. Then the exercises can become progressively harder- but only if they are being carried out correctly. There is no point in doing an advanced exercise if you do not have the control to maintain correct posture and breathing.
5. **Precision**- Precision of movement is a goal that will be attained by repetition and awareness gained during regular practice under close supervision of the Pilates Instructor, who will give continuous feedback during each session.
6. **Flowing Movements**- The body works like a machine and the joints will remain healthy through smooth movement.
7. **Isolation**- The ability to learn to recognise and correct particular faulty movement patterns.
8. **Routine**- The exercises should be performed regularly so that the movements can be integrated into daily tasks.

control programmes in order to prevent injuries and improve performance. Traditional Pilates is a set of 34 main exercises which are often extremely difficult to perform and may seem challenging even for the professional athlete. Yet but over the past few years, a



modified version has been developed through scientific research. This takes the original exercises, breaks them down and makes them safe, practicable, and effective for everyone.

One of the main benefits of Pilates is that it is tailored for the individual. Ideally, any one who is serious about learning the correct technique should have at least one individual session with an experienced Pilates Instructor or physiotherapist who would be able to recognise any postural or movement dysfunctions, and design a programme specifically designed for that person. This would also prepare one for a Pilates Class, which is more motivating, and allows continuous feedback from the instructor. Booking into a class also helps with discipline, as it is so easy to overlook an exercise session, if you would have been doing it alone, but not if you have an appointment in your diary!

Pilates can make a difference to everyone. If you suffer from back pain or a chronic injury, then you need to find out which muscles are not doing their job properly - and re-educate them. Faulty movements are known to cause pain, so often by simply correcting the movement dysfunction, the pain is alleviated.

People who have suffered for years gradually re-acquire ease of movement, and consequently, their life, again. They feel fitter, happier, and more independent as they realise that they can do things which they thought they would never be able to again.

For those who have an injury or back pain it is essential that a physiotherapist assesses them fully before enrolling in a Pilates Class. In the clinical setting the group must be less of than 10 participants, so that individual attention can be given at all times.

BENEFITS OF PILATES

- Better posture
- Improved strength and flexibility
- More efficient breathing
- Better lymph flow, leading to decreased toxins in the body
- Lower stress levels
- Better tone to muscles
- Improved joint mobility
- Less pain
- Fewer headaches (if caused by posture)
- Better bone density
- Stronger immune system
- Fewer injuries
- Improved performance for dancers/athletes.

Ultimately, the significance of the Pilates technique is that it unlocks your potential.

It improves core strength, general muscle tone, flexibility and balance. Better posture and body awareness often lead to a reduction in pain as quality of movement improves. It does not replace other forms of exercise but rather supports them, giving you the freedom to live a healthier, more active lifestyle and to cope with the stresses and strains of every day life.



“I have seen many people who have suffered for years gradually get their life back again.”

