

PILATES PRINCIPLES

FREE SPIRIT YOGA AND PILATES

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BENEFITS: Pilates is the perfect method of body conditioning for strength, flexibility and the shape you have always wanted in less than an hour a day. No equipment necessary. Externally, you notice how dramatically your body will change, your thighs and buttocks will slenderize, and you will become more keenly aware of your powerhouse. This place that is like a wide belt around the middle of your body will be relied upon more and more in every physical activity. Whether you are sitting or walking, your body will feel lifted. As a result you will feel uplifted and joyous. You will be completely energized, grounded and ready. Pilates can completely change your life, it will help you maintain a healthy lifestyle, assist with the recovery from injuries and transform your self-image and sense of worth and keep you calm and centered.

HISTORY: Pilates is a scientific system of mind / body conditioning that was developed by Joseph Pilates, over 80 years ago. He was born in 1880 and was a frail child with serious health problems. As a young man he became passionate about physical fitness as a way to transform his physical appearance and improve his health. After years of research, study and expertise he created a complete system that combined Eastern and Western philosophies and movements, gymnastics and yoga principles and mental and physical exercises that would strengthen the body and free the mind. During the war years Joseph designed equipment from anything readily available, his bunk, the bedsprings, a chair etc. to assist people who were not physically able to do the mat work. (Thus the beginning of the reformer equipment.) The evolution of the original form of Pilates has evolved over the years as a new generation of professionals have added exercises to develop different parts of the body. Joseph Pilates work was preserved by Sean Gallagher who is a certified Pilates instructor and physical therapist. Gallagher has incorporated and integrated Pilates into modalities of treatment that health care practitioners can provide and utilize.

BREATHING: Each movement is tied to a specific manner of breathing. Correct breathing allows oxygen to nourish the muscles being utilized, and to release toxins and non-beneficial chemicals stored in the muscles. The chemicals released are related to pain and fatigue and are substances that our body desperately needs to be rid of. Not only is it necessary to take in an ample supply of oxygen but we must fully and purposefully exhale (or wring our lungs.)

For Pilates exercises you need to retrain yourself to breathe in a new way. When most of us breathe we expand the top of our chest, which is a shallow breath. What we need to learn to do is breathe into our back, in the area that expands our lower ribs. Instead of expanding the front of your chest as you inhale or puff out your tummy, you need to concentrate on filling the bottom portion of your lungs. You will get the sensation that you are breathing into the small of your back. This form of deep breathing allows you to bend and move without restricting the amount of oxygen you are taking in. The oxygen intake allows nourishment to travel to the muscles being worked. As you fully exhale, all of the unused gasses and non-beneficial chemicals stored in your body have an escape-route. When these elements are exhaled, you will become more clear-headed, your stamina increases, you release

lactic acids within your muscles that make you feel sore, and most important, you become more relaxed.

RELAXATION: One of the skills you will need to learn is how to work out without creating undue tension in areas of the body that are not being worked. When people first start this work they simply work too hard. A lot of us are used to exercising with brute strength but in Pilates the opposite is true. You will be working a specific area of the body in each exercise and it is your task to make certain that the areas not involved are working to support the movement. They are engaged, but not tense. With Pilates it is the involvement of the entire body that helps to relieve tension in the body. After you finish your routine, you should have eliminated stress significantly physically and mentally.

CONCENTRATION: As your ability to concentrate on a specific area of your body improves you will dramatically enhance the quality of your movements. The movements you will be executing are very specific to an area of the body and it is essential that you concentrate your attention to ensure that the specific is working correctly. When you are mindful of your movements your brain and body work together harmoniously and effectively.

CONTROL: Control is an essential key to the quality of your movements. With this form of exercise you do not have to overly exert yourself. You will not be flailing your limbs here and there, you will be moving gracefully, with several parts of your body engaged in mindful movement simultaneously. There are never movements that are propelled by momentum. The exercises are executed by breathing, concentration and stretching. At first this will seem awkward.

FLUIDITY: the quality of being graceful while performing the movements stems from the fluidity of one movement blending into the next, moving with grace and precision. Each movement of exercise has a specific starting and ending point, but it is up to you to blend these places into each other even if you are instructed to hold at a certain point in each movement for a certain number of counts, that hold is not a place to stop, but rather a place where the stretch or movement continues.

WORKING INSIDE OUT AND OUTSIDE IN: you will be strengthening smaller muscle groups to support the movement and abilities of the larger muscles. You will be working in a controlled fashion to free your mind and you will be using your mind to free your body. When you are finished with this routine, there will be a closer bond between these 2 aspects of your persona. You will feel whole...energized...powerful.

YOUR POWERHOUSE: When the exercises are done correctly you will be using your powerhouse, your inside, to be the root of all movement. This centre is the place that connects the abdominal muscles with the small of the back with the buttocks. From the strength of your powerhouse you will notice changes in the way you stand, walk, move, carry yourself and physically relate to the world around you. You will be doing an external movement that will vastly improve your inner life. Working from the inside out and the outside in will positively affect your mental clarity, the way you feel, your confidence level, your energy level, and it will create a sense of tranquility and peace of mind. The powerhouse is located in the centre of your body, it is the exact point between the upper half and lower half of your body meet. It is your girdle of strength. These muscles are called the rectus abdominis (the obliques) and the transversus abdominis. The place where your transversus abdominis, the multifidus and the erector spinae connect is the powerhouse, deep within the abdomen. Abdominal muscles criss-cross in layers across the front of our bodies like a corset, to act as a support for the spine. It is within the abdominal region that we support our spine and all of our internal organs. When we strengthen this area we improve our alignment and posture and reduce or eliminate many problems associated with chronic pain and reverse conditions that cause back and neck problems. A lot of people

have back pain because their powerhouse is not strong and they do not understand how to engage and utilize it.

STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY: this work is a combination of art and science. Each movement links breathing with strengthening and stretching. Each movement is designed to scientifically oxygenate, then stretch, then strengthen a particular muscle group. The premise of the work is to strengthen smaller muscle groups to support larger muscles.

FREEDOM AND CONTROL: to hold up your spine properly, you have to strengthen your abdominal musculature. As you focus on pulling in your powerhouse, the place that links the abdominal muscles with the lower back and the buttocks, you can instantly feel a lengthening sensation in the lower back. If you pull the lateral muscles in the back down, the shoulders drop, the neck lengthens and the spine becomes straighter. The key is to pull inward into your spine by using your powerhouse. This supports your spine and requires intense concentration. Your movements are done at a slow to moderate speed. You must at all times maintain control.

Pilates is a series of controlled movements done within the frame of your body, so that any movement will not pull you away from the centre of your body. If you exceed your boundaries you are inviting injury. Don't rely solely upon the large muscles to lift your leg up, because inevitably you will injure the smaller muscles that support that movement. Initiate all movements from your powerhouse. This will help to strengthen the smaller muscles and ligaments that support larger muscles and joints.

As you strengthen your abdominal region another piece of the puzzle begins to fit into place and that is the proper placement of the rib cage. If you feel as if your ribs are protruding out, softly with your breath, let them fall toward your back. This lengthens your spine and you will feel more properly aligned.

We develop our abs to look great and to act as a support system for our spine. As this support system strengthens, we work on lengthening the spine. The longer your spine the more efficiently your body operates. The more efficiently your body operates the more efficient your nervous system operates. The more efficient your nervous system operates the more efficiently your blood flows.

Energy passes through the vertebrae all along the spine. The longer your spine is the more room you have between each vertebrae. The more space between each vertebrae the more energy you will have. Lengthening your spine is essential to the transformation of the way you look and feel.