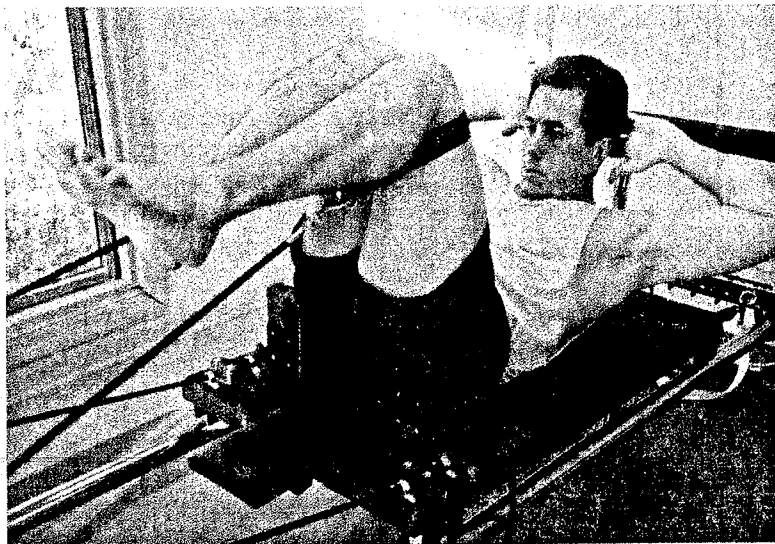


New Body, New Life: Pilates Style

Total conditioning, which includes improving strength, endurance, and coordination, is the Pilates goal.

by Dan Tripp



Have you ever wished for more mental and physical energy to assist you in playing with your children or grandchildren? Have you ever wished to have more stamina to do your household chores, yard work, or to play that extra game of tennis? Have you ever wished to have energy at the end of your day rather than feeling fatigued and drained? Have you ever wondered why so many people accept the aches and pains with which they live from day to day? Why do we act and move the way we do?

The answers and solutions to these questions and more can be found quite simply by increasing core strength and becoming more functional in our movements. Our workplace and environment have become more sedentary, and our leisure time has followed suit. Children now spend more time in front of a television or computer than ever before and as a

consequence these habits will most likely follow them into adulthood.

The immobility that results from not using our bodies in functional ways not only restricts the movements of our joints but also places our bodies and muscles in an unbalanced configuration. We begin to favor one group of muscles more than others when we perform our day-to-day activities. During these activities we tend to use one arm or leg more than the other, or to place more of our weight on one hip than the other, and to utilize one shoulder more than the other. These one-sided actions cause imbalances in the body. Even the way we walk, perhaps with an unnoticeable longer stride in one leg, can unbalance our musculoskeletal structures and can lead to back pain and even headaches.

To overcome the effects of immobility and muscular imbalances it becomes important for us to understand how our

bodies work and react to various stresses. The strengthening and stretching of our bodies, in the correct manner, is vital in preventing injury or pain. There are no shortcuts to a better body, a new self, or a sense of achieving new energy and vitality at whatever age you are. If we do not exercise our bodies regularly in the correct manner with the right techniques, our bodies will decay and fall apart.

Well, imagine an exercise routine that can give you a firm, flat stomach, improve your posture, provide you with more energy, and maybe even make you taller! Imagine an exercise routine that does not involve mindless jumping up and down to loud, pounding music in order to achieve great muscle tone. Imagine an exercise routine that provides you with the stretching benefits of yoga and the strengthening benefits of weight training. Imagine an exercise routine



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that provides you with the control, balance, and strength of a gymnast or a competitive athlete. Imagine an exercise routine that combines all of these elements and more!

This is the routine that will change your life and your mental attitude to your own body. This is the routine that will make you feel years younger, improve your posture and tone flabby muscles. This is the routine that can eliminate back pain and headaches and help you enjoy a better sex life!

This routine was developed almost one hundred years ago and is based on principles from various forms of conditioning, such as yoga, ballet, martial arts, and even animal movements. It is a method of conditioning both simple in theory and extremely effective in practice. The originator of this method, Joseph Pilates, was born in Germany in the late 1800's. Joseph was an all-around athlete-body-builder, boxer, gymnast and diver. During World War I, he turned his attention toward reconditioning the wounded and disabled. He devised a series of mat exercises and by attaching springs to hospital beds, he designed the apparatus that eventually evolved into what we call the "Reformer."

Although Pilates training has been around for almost a century, it has only been in recent years that the method has received widespread recognition. At first glance, Pilates seems like a

study in paradox: traditional simplicity that incorporates modern thinking, toning the body by focusing on the mind, and conditioning specific body parts by considering the body as a whole.

Regardless, the Pilates method is making perfect sense to more and more people worldwide. While Pilates (pronounced Puh-la-tees) has found its most loyal following among professional dancers and entertainers, in the past few years people of all walks of life have been seeking out its benefits.

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The method started out as a simple set of corrective exercises, but it has evolved into a comprehensive fitness program.

In all, the Pilates method consists of dozens of mat exercises and hundreds of movements on a handful of apparatus, such as the WundaChair, Step Barrel, Trapeze and the Reformer. The most popular, and perhaps the most versatile, is the Reformer. Today, the Reformer (a sliding horizontal platform, on which the user sits, kneels,

stands or reclines) has become the central apparatus of the Pilates programs.

Three things make the Reformer different from other pieces of exercise equipment: the type of resistance it provides, its use as a total body conditioner, and its ability to teach body awareness as it rebalances musculature. Although it was originally designed for rehabilitation, its emphasis on total body conditioning and functional movement has made it a useful technique for overall conditioning and

injury prevention. The resistance on the Reformer is regulated by detachable springs hooked onto the carriage, and the resistance can vary according to the exercise and the exerciser. The individual controls movement by pushing on a padded bar or pulling straps. Compared to traditional "weight training," the springs

provide resistance which much more closely approximates natural muscle activity. Muscles that might not be activated in weight-bearing positions can be strengthened because resistance is tailored to what the muscle can tolerate.

Total conditioning, which includes improving strength, endurance, and coordination, is the Pilates goal. Aerobic exercise and increased bulk are not the program's intentions. Rather, Pilates training produces a

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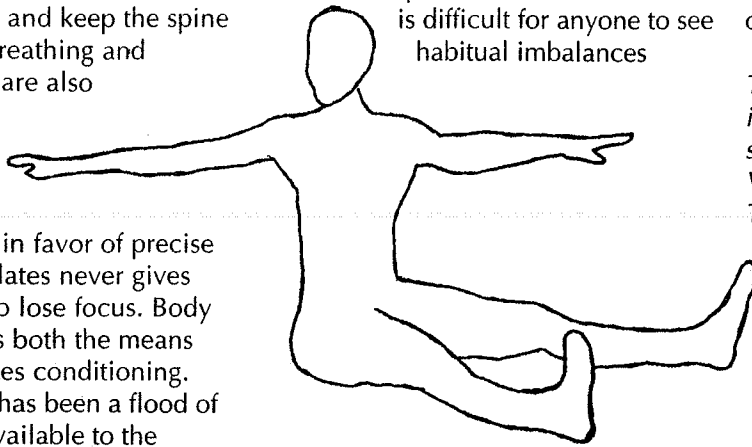
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lean, lithe physique—a conditioned, functional body. Body awareness is also enhanced by use of the method, which also emphasizes muscular balance, alignment, and bilateral conditioning—all of which stems from a “girdle of strength” in the body’s center. Most of the exercise sessions begin with movement to control the abdominal muscles and keep the spine properly aligned. Breathing and abdominal support are also emphasized in every movement sequence. A set number of repetitions are discarded in favor of precise movements, and Pilates never gives the exerciser time to lose focus. Body awareness becomes both the means and the end of Pilates conditioning.

Recently, there has been a flood of books and videos available to the public to learn the Pilates method. Although these tools can be helpful for individuals seeking to keep their routines interesting and varied, they are not recommended to take the place of working with an experienced and qualified Pilates instructor.

Traditionally, Pilates has been a method passed down from teacher to student, in a similar fashion as martial art training. It is best learned by apprenticing with a mentor who has established him/herself as a reliable and credible teacher and is willing to impart knowledge learned through experience of the method. It is difficult for anyone to see habitual imbalances



embedded in their own mind and body. Because the deviations begin to feel normal over time, a student is often not aware of his/her own dysfunction. By offering the perspective of an interested and educated onlooker, the teacher

becomes the catalyst for increased awareness and more efficient movement. Having the help of an experienced guide will enable the individual utilizing the Pilates method to become more aware of thought and motion, to improve connections to mind and body, thus improving connections to others and inevitably enhancing quality of life in every way.

The Head-to-toe Pilates Method Training Studio has been in existence for seven years and is the Tennessee Valley's only dedicated Pilates Studio. The Head-to-toe Pilates Teacher Training and Certification School is now in its second year of equipping teachers with the necessary tools and essential knowledge of core movement and core function and assuring that this knowledge is taught both reliably and responsibly. For information about services, for answers to questions regarding your practice of Pilates, or for information regarding a specific teacher in your area call 256-772-2006 or e-mail PilatesNow@aol.com. See ad on page 23.

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