PATIENT HANDOUT

Pilates for a Healthy Mind and Body

The world is getting more complex and stressful every day. People are eating more processed foods, moving less and experiencing higher levels of anxiety. The results can mean obesity, depression, conditions such as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, early degeneration and arthritis, general pains and even infertility.

Pilates is a method to open the door to a world of wellness by healing the body, mind and spirit. Pilates achieves this objective by adhering to its core principles of efficient breathing, proper alignment and core stability.

Pilates focuses on whole-body integration, rather than isolated muscle strengthening, to sculpt long, lean muscles. By targeting core musculature and teaching efficient motion patterns, Pilates practitioners work on developing flat abdominals and a strong back for an evenly conditioned body that can resist injury and chronic pain.

One core Pilates principle is efficient breathing. Deep-nostril, posterior-lateral breathing provides cells with high oxygen levels, while relaxing the body and increasing spinal flexibility. Slow nasal breathing also allows the upper and lower parts of the chest cavity to expand so the diaphragm can pull air into the lower lobes of the lungs, where most oxygen exchange takes place. Linking breathing with movement can encourage natural synchronized patterns in which actions encourage other actions.

Pilates also adheres to the principles of proper alignment and movement from the core. Pilates can help guide you on properly aligning the spine and positioning each joint, and it can teach how to engage or relax muscles and coordinate actions.

Proper alignment influences function, breathing performance, spine stability and freedom of movement. Once you attain proper alignment, you can engage the spine stabilizers and transfer these patterns to everyday activities.

Pilates relies on specific movements and machines to achieve its goals. Depending on the particular application, common Pilates motions include hundreds, in which participants lie supine with legs at 90 degrees and raise the arms off the floor in small quick motions; roll ups, a slow sit-up performed with arms at the sides; and double-leg stretches, in which participants lie supine and slowly move the outstretched legs from 90 degrees to 45 degrees, and then back to the center.

Controlled movement and proper breathing are essential during exercises. Many movements originate from a neutral pelvis—the natural anatomical curve that's produced when the pubic bone and hip bones are parallel to the floor when lying supine. Your lower back shouldn't be flat on the floor or arched beyond normal range.

While many Pilates motions receive resistance from only gravity and bodyweight, instructors often use exercise equipment to achieve therapeutic objectives. Here are the most common options.

- *Reformer.* The Reformer is the most popular piece of Pilates equipment and the cornerstone of many programs. The Reformer, which resembles a traditional weight bench, features a sliding carriage and a system of springs and ropes that assist and resist movements.
- *Trapeze tables.* Trapeze tables feature a metal or wood frame that's mounted over a bench, which challenges the body in multiple planes of motion. Other equipment includes stability chairs, arc barrels and spine supporters.
- *Mats.* Used primarily for at-home programs, cushioned exercise mats make many of the stretching and gravity-resisted floor motions of Pilates possible.
- *Circles and ring toners.* Descended from the "magic circles" devised by founder Joseph Pilates, exercise circles and rings improve muscle tone, endurance, coordination and balance. You can complete exercise motions while holding the rings in various positions to target the inner and outer thighs, upper arms, chest and pelvic floor.
- *Balance devices.* Pilates focuses on maximizing balance. A series of devices challenge balance during Pilates exercises, such as balance boards, rotator discs, exercise domes and fitness balls.
- *Exercise accessories.* Foam rollers, exercise bands, foot plates, jump boards and Pilates sticks can assist and resist exercise motions.

Pilates participation grew by 500 percent between 2000 and 2004. Clearly, people are responding to the power of this method to energize the mind and heal the body. While some of the exercises and machines appear unconventional, a certified Pilates therapist can give you the tools you'll need on your path to a healthier life. ■

NOTES

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

This Patient Handout is sponsored by:

STOTT PILATES®
merrithew CORPORATION

STOTT Pilates
2200 Yonge St., #500
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4S 2C6
Phone: (800) 910-0001
Web: www.stottpilates.com

advance FOR DIRECTORS IN Rehabilitation