

# Pilates—Is It Right for You?



have adequate endurance to work properly while we go about our daily activities, they work to keep our spines stable.

Research shows that in the presence of back pain, the first muscles to become inhibited are the transversus abdominis and lumbar multifidi.<sup>1</sup> Unless reactivated and strengthened by a form of exercise such as Pilates, those muscles may continue to have difficulty stabilizing the spine. With poor stabilization, excessive and repetitive shearing and compressive forces across the spine can lead to further spinal injury and pain. Thus, those with spinal injuries can especially benefit from Pilates.

Improved posture is another great benefit of Pilates. Poor posture can be due to a combination of factors including core and scapular weakness, spinal stiffness, and/ or other structural imbalances such as an increased kyphosis or scoliosis. Besides working on core control, Pilates exercises work to improve segmental mobility of our spines – in other words, individual movement of one vertebra on another. This improved spinal mobility can sometimes alone allow us to stand straighter, and will allow for a more healthy way of moving for our spines.

Our bodies will also function with better posture once core muscles are trained to hold the body more upright, and scapular muscles are strong enough to keep the shoulder girdles from falling forward. Individuals with shoulder problems can also benefit from Pilates strengthening since many problems that we see at the shoulder are related to muscular imbalance and poor shoulder positioning.

## WHAT PILATES PROGRAM WOULD BE BEST FOR ME?

Pilates training can come in many forms. Some individuals follow a DVD at home or take a mat class at a gym or Pilates studio. Others have

access to a facility offering group or individual training on Pilates equipment. One thing to note is that working on a mat alone can often be more difficult than working on an apparatus. With mat work, you need to be strong enough to control your body in space without support from a machine. And, although most exercises can be modified, some mat exercises can be difficult for those with neck problems.

Use of Pilates equipment, such as the Reformer or Trapeze table, can be incredibly versatile. Those just starting a Pilates program might need assistance for various movements, which springs on the equipment can provide. These springs can also challenge the strongest and most fit individuals with a total body workout.

Most important to note is that not every Pilates exercise is good for every individual – and some can even be detrimental. As Pilates practitioners in a rehabilitation setting, we are very selective with exercises prescribed and allowed for our clients. These selections are based on one’s diagnosis, physical problems at hand, and other medical conditions. If you have questions regarding whether your Pilates program is right for you, seek assistance from a certified Pilates practitioner. ■

## Reference

1. Hides JA, Stokes MJ, Saide M, Jull GA, Cooper DH. Evidence of lumbar multifidus muscle wasting ipsilateral to symptoms in patients with acute/ subacute low back pain. *Spine*. 1994 Jan 15; 19 (2): 165-72.

*Information for this Handout is provided by Kirsten Albrecht, owner of Physical Therapy and Pilates Restoration, LLC in Cheshire, CT. She is a certified Pilates practitioner through Polestar Education.*

## NOTES:

---



---



---



---



---



---

**M**any have heard the name. Many have tried it. Countless others even believe it has “changed their life.” I am talking about Pilates - a method of exercise developed out of Germany by Joseph Pilates back in the early 1900s. When performed correctly, Pilates can be a powerful form of strengthening that activates the core muscles and teaches our bodies how to move properly and efficiently. The practice connects the mind to the body, and can be therapeutic in many mental and physical ways. If you are already engaging in a Pilates exercise program, or are looking to start, here are some things to consider:

## THE BENEFITS OF PILATES

Pilates exercises follow a set of principles developed by Joseph Pilates. One of the main principles of Pilates pertains to core control. When working on core control, we especially try to activate the transversus abdominis, a deep abdominal muscle that, when drawn inwards, functions like a corset around our backs. We also try to activate the multifidi, which are little muscles attaching the vertebrae. When these deep muscles are “turning on” correctly, and