

The Principles of Pilates



BALANCE

After a Pilates session, a client should feel “balanced.” More specifically, the client has completed a well-rounded exercise program that has worked on improving both strength and flexibility. There is great attention to the selection of exercises that would best address an individual client’s postural dysfunctions. After a class, in addition to feeling “shaky and worked,” clients will often say they feel taller and lighter on their feet.

BREATHING

While the benefits are enormous, teaching a client the concept of breathing during Pilates is not easy and takes time. Proper breathing is taught very early on in one’s Pilates practice, but the powerful benefits of breathing often are achieved much later in one’s practice. Pilates stresses posterior lateral rib cage breathing which emphasizes using the diaphragm muscle (the primary muscle of inhalation) and the abdominals (important spine stabilizers and assist with exhalation). Initially a client is focusing on so many things, but once the movements in the body are learned, more attention can then be put on breathing. The breath and the movement go hand in hand.

CENTERING

Centering oneself or focusing on one’s core is part of every Pilates movement. Each exercise begins with correctly tightening your core (originally termed the powerhouse) to stabilize and protect your spine. Many people are drawn to Pilates for this very reason—to strengthen their core to eliminate back pain or to improve performance in a sport.

CONTROL AND PRECISION

During Pilates, a client is always in control of her body and the movements she is performing. Because of this, Pilates can be a very safe

and effective form of exercise for anyone. As Pilates movements become more advanced, the control of a movement becomes increasingly important. The end result is a very advanced exercise that looks easy and effortless. Emphasis is on precision of a movement and maintaining good form. The more precise one can be with a movement, the more one will benefit from the exercise. Once a client starts to lose good form, the exercise is over. Doing 6 repetitions of an exercise correctly, with good form, is much more effective than 15 repetitions with bad form.

EFFICIENCY / FLOW OF MOVEMENT

Pilates has a strong focus on movement versus holding a pose or position. Throughout a class, there is constant movement from one exercise into the next. As a result, strength and stamina are developed. Many movements are designed to improve posture and lengthen the spine, improve flexibility of muscles, and mobility at joints.

HARMONY

Good Pilates practice requires discipline. The outcome of this mind and body exercise is dependent on continuing to work on improving the flow of exercise, challenging oneself and developing a true sense of harmony and well being. ■

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NOTES:

Joseph Pilates has written that “physical fitness is the first requisite of happiness.” To enjoy and receive the full benefits of Pilates, understanding the application of the basic principles is imperative. It takes both time and patience for each of these principles to become a natural and inherent part of each movement. This is why Pilates is different from other forms of exercise, and can be so enjoyable, interesting, always challenging, and even addictive.

AWARENESS AND CONCENTRATION

Developing a strong mind-body connection is an essential component of Pilates. It begins with learning about the body. There is never a sense of “going through the motions.” There is careful attention to each and every movement. The more you develop a strong sense of awareness, the more you will benefit from Pilates. Clients are taught the correct positions they should be in and how to hold those positions with movement such as in maintaining a neutral spine during leg work. Body awareness is also taught in regards to which muscles one should use and where to initiate a movement.