



***The Power of Pilates:
Sharpening the Mind, Sculpting the Body
By Jason Cheng, DO***

“In 10 sessions, you’ll feel the difference; in 20 you’ll see the difference; and in 30, you’ll have a whole new body”

These are the famous words by the founder of Contrology, Joseph H. Pilates. What we call Pilates today is largely a body of systematic movements that “Joe” taught for almost a century now. Ironically, Contrology—the original name of his method—says much more about what the exercises are all about. Control. Unlike many other workout methods, Joseph Pilates began his workout method as a form of rehabilitation for the military in Britain. It was not until he and his wife Clara, a nurse, moved and started their studio in New York did Pilate’s ideas become integrated into American physical fitness. From ballet dancers to Hollywood actors, Pilates is rapidly becoming the fastest growing exercise regimen exploding in gyms, schools, videos, books, and studios everywhere.

What makes Pilates unique?

Pilates, or Contrology as Pilates named it, is movement therapy designed to focus the mind and strengthen your entire body, with particular emphasis on the lumbar-pelvic spine. Whereas most of our common workout programs are designed specifically for region, i.e. buns, abs, legs, cardio, etc, where the focus is on repetitions, increasing weight, or endurance, the Pilates Method is focused primarily on the process first. Pilates often said he’d rather see one proper abdominal exercise done properly rather than 100 done incorrectly. However, this is not to say that you can’t enjoy the results and enormous benefits that Pilates brings: leaner figure, increased endurance, greater flexibility, mental concentration and focus, and even sexual stamina! Compared often to yoga, Pilate exercises are a dynamic interaction between mental visualization and physical movement. Unlike the many fad exercise workouts we see that emphasize reps and weights that often lead to injury, the Pilates Method is focused on quality and efficiency of movement, not muscling your way to abs of steel or developing bulky muscles.

Is Pilates similar to yoga?

Pilates is a form of movement therapy. This means that it can be used for rehabilitation purposes, fitness purposes, or athletic training. Whereas Pilates is disciplined movement therapy, yoga is a disciplined meditative art form, derived from the Indian healing arts called Ayurveda.

However, there are some philosophic similarities. Though Pilates is movement based and Yoga is meditative based, they both focus on concentration and breathing as integral parts of their respective disciplines. They also both have healing and rehabilitation qualities, but from opposite spectrums. Although methodically different, they are philosophically

very similar and can synergistically be combined for improvement in all areas of your physical, mental, and emotional health maintenance.

Is Pilates for everyone?

Of course! Whether you're an Olympic athlete training for gold, a weekend runner through the local park, or an 80-year-old grandmother, the Pilates Method is able to bring all the benefits of strength, flexibility, and mental focus and clarity to everybody. From Sasha Cohen, an Olympic skater who utilized Pilates to rehabilitate from back surgery in less than a year to David Duval, who in July's "Golf Digest" discussed how integrating Pilates-based exercises was able to enhance the level of his playing to finally winning the British Open, athletes of all sports and caliber have been taking their game to the next level. It's no secret that this has been a godsend for athletes; Pilates himself was a gymnast, bodybuilder and skier himself.

What if I have health problems...is it still for me?

Absolutely!

Pilates, himself having to grow up with an assortment of illnesses, utilized his knowledge of biomechanics and Eastern wisdom to develop this method which he used to help sick army men, rehabilitate dancers, and improve the lives and health of all those that have come into contact with it. There is a whole field of Pilates that is being utilized in physical therapy clinics and rehabilitation centers. We are now beginning to realize the importance of the "core", or "powerhouse" muscles in the pelvic-abdominal region that are so vital for posture, back stability, bone stability, (read: osteoporosis), joint health, and even sexual health.

First discuss with your physician and therapists about incorporating Pilates into your fitness and/or rehab workout. Many practitioners welcome an intuitive and active patient, it only makes their job that much more interesting and educational. Doctors have to stay on top of so much information these days, so a good physician will be open to new forms of treatment and therapy, as long as they believe it is safe and will do no harm.

What can Pilates do for me?

1. Contoured and lean, not bulky, muscle development
2. Dramatically improved flexibility
3. Proper posture
4. Svelte, contoured body line
5. Improved mental focus
6. Rehabilitation of many injuries and conditions:
Including back pain, arthritis, stroke, heart attack, sexual dysfunction, scoliosis, Osteoporosis, and many more

Pilates can improve my sex life??

Believe it...it's true. It only makes sense too. An enormous amount of research is being placed in the pelvic floor and pelvic muscles (i.e. Kegel muscles) for sexual dysfunction in both sexes. Pilates originally aimed his exercises to improve all areas of life, especially sexuality and sexual health. Considering that all the organs and nerves that are responsible for erections to orgasm are housed in the "core" region of our pelvis, it's only obvious that paying attention to this region pose enormous benefits for your sexual health.

How long will it take to see these results?

Just as with anything else with life, the more committed you are, the more quickly you will see the results. Pilates is not a weekend or overnight workout. It is a systematic method that requires both time and patience, however the results continue to manifest through time. Usually, within a few weeks you may notice changes in not just how you sit, stand, walk, or move, but even in the way you speak, or perhaps an increase in self-confidence and image as you project yourself to others.

Can these exercises be done alone or with an instructor?

It is best to learn and continue your training in the Pilates Method with a certified instructor. This does not mean you need to only do your workouts with an instructor's supervision, but they make crucial corrections and training so that you will progress safely and effectively. There are many intricately subtle, yet profound adjustments to your posture; your positioning and breathing that have tremendous impact on your success with Pilates. As with any other workout, practicing the movements improperly can do more harm than good.

How do I find a qualified Pilates instructor?

It is important to distinguish qualified versus non-qualified individuals who claim to have expertise in Pilates. With the growing demand for Pilates instructors as seen in videos and gyms, many individuals are tempted to call themselves Pilates instructors after only having attended a weekend or weeklong course. These are not individuals you should entrust your body to. As with everything else in life, what you pay is what you get.

Ideally, the individual has received certification from an in-depth training institution with at least a yearlong diverse training regimen including Pilates principles, movement mechanics, physical therapy assessment, anatomy and physiology, and rehabilitation. The list could go on, but you realize that a true Pilates instructor has to have education and experience, just as you'd expect from a physical therapist or a doctor. Don't trust your body to someone who isn't completely devoted to rigorous training and continuing education.

Here are some of the more notable training programs:

1. Body Arts and Science International
Costa Mesa, Ca. (949) 642-8139
www.basipilates.com
2. The Pilates Method Alliance
(877) 528-3335
www.pilatesmethodalliance.org
3. Core Dynamics
Santa Fe, NM. (505) 988-5076
4. Physical Mind Institute
Santa Fe, NM (800) 505-1990
www.methodfitness.com
5. Stott Pilates International Certification Center
Toronto, CANADA (416) 482-4050
www.stottconditioning.com
6. Polestar Education, LLC
Coral Gables, Fl. (800) 387-3651
www.polestareducation.com

Back pain, headaches, depression, and all health problems are contributed to and are contributed by bad posture and poor body mechanics. Improving one will no doubt improve the other, which is why emphasizing efficiency of movement helps. We all want to feel and look younger, and devoting time to learning how to reengineer our mind and body is a wonderful lifetime journey we can all take together.

It's by no means a short-term fix, as anything effective or meaningful in life rarely is. However, as you institute each exercise that we provide in the studio and studios you may visit, you will find your breathing, your posture, your body, and of course your self-confidence begin to journey into new uncharted territory. Enjoy!

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