

GETTING STARTED: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS PILATES?

Developed by Joseph Pilates in the early part of the 20th century, Pilates is a unique, full-body exercise system with exercises performed on a mat or on special equipment created by Joseph Pilates that emphasizes spring resistance. Joseph Pilates believed that the mind played a vital role in body conditioning and designed the method around six guiding principles: breath, control, precision, centering, concentration and flow. Pilates focuses on strengthening the core of the body and creates flexibility in the arms, legs and supporting muscle groups—it fortifies the mind-body connection and increases kinesthetic awareness.

2. WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT PILATES?

Pilates is a truly effective workout that completely engages your body and your mind. It is low impact and emphasizes quality over quantity. Everyone can do Pilates—regardless of age or fitness level. Whatever your personal goals—whether you need to recover from an injury, correct an imbalance created from bad posture and/or repetitive motion, enhance your athletic routine, or tone and shape your body—Pilates is an efficient method for success. You'll see results quickly as you learn a truly enjoyable form of exercise.

3. WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TO SESSIONS?

Pilates is most often practiced in socks or bare feet. Wear close-fitting comfortable exercise clothes of lightweight cotton or another breathable fabric. You'll spend a lot of the session on your back so you won't want to wear a ponytail or bun in your hair. You'll also want to remove large or dangling jewelry for safety and comfort.

4. DO I NEED TO BRING ANYTHING TO THE SESSION?

You may take small sips of water throughout the session so bring a bottle of water. If towels aren't provided, bring one towel to place on your mat and another for underneath your head and neck.

5. CAN I EAT OR DRINK BEFORE SESSION?

The core—or center of your body—is the basis for all Pilate exercises. You will use your abdominal muscles constantly. To avoid discomfort don't eat the hour before your session. To concentrate and work effectively you need to be well nourished so don't starve yourself—just don't eat the hour before class. The same goes with water—slow down to sips the hour before class. Don't do Pilates with a full bladder—feel free to use the restroom at any time.

FREQUENT QUESTIONS... CONTINUED

7. ARE THERE INSTRUCTIONAL TERMS I SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH?

There are many terms and verbal cues used in Pilates instruction—you'll find them helpful throughout your practice. See Section III for a list of the most frequently used cues. You should always feel free to speak up and ask if a particular cue isn't clear to you.

8. HOW SHOULD I BREATHE DURING EXERCISES?

Deep breathing is an important part of your Pilates practice. It sets the tempo and helps you to stay in proper alignment. For each movement you'll inhale into the back of the rib cage to prepare for exertion, you'll deeply exhale just before and throughout exertion. For more on breathing and other principles see Section II.

9. WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

Stop if you feel any sharp pain, or straining in the neck or back. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Don't be afraid to speak up—exercises can be modified to make them safe and effective for you.* You should understand the difference between the good pain that accompanies a strong workout and the bad pain that can signal a problem—see Section III for more on pain signals.

10. HOW OFTEN SHOULD I DO PILATES?

The more time you spend working, the more improvements you'll see. You can do Pilates every day. At minimum, try to do Pilates 2-4 times per week. Consistent practice will help you master the exercises and principles. It will also support the mind-body connection that is such an integral part of the Pilates method.

11. HOW DO I INCORPORATE PILATES INTO MY CURRENT FITNESS REGIME?

Pilates increases strength, flexibility and coordination—and as such is the perfect complement to any fitness or training regime. As noted above, try to fit in at least 2 instructed Pilates sessions into your weekly routine.

12. HOW CAN I PRACTICE AT HOME?

Once you've learned a mat exercise, practice it at home. Start slowly, doing one or two exercises from each class to build your home routine. Be sure you feel comfortable and confident that you are in proper alignment and executed the movements with precision. Another option is to purchase a video to add practice at home on days you don't have an instruction—ask your instructor for a recommendation. But remember, the same guidelines apply... wait until you have had enough instruction to perform the exercises with accuracy.

* If you are pregnant or have a medical condition such as osteoporosis, heart problems, herniated disks or glaucoma, seek the counsel of your healthcare professional and consider private instruction or a customized program

PILATES: THE SIX PRINCIPLES

"Contrology is complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit. Through Contrology you first purposefully acquire complete control of your own body and then through proper repetition of its exercises you gradually and progressively acquire that natural rhythm and coordination associated with all your subconscious activities." – Joseph Pilates

Joseph Pilates developed the Pilates method of exercise in the early part of the 20th century. Originally called "Contrology" it was formulated upon the following six principles, each emphasizing the mind-body connection.

B R E A T H

Everything begins with breath. Connect your breath to movement. Inhale as you prepare for the movement and exhale as you execute the movement. Deep (diaphragmatic) breathing into the back of the rib cage creates a free flow of cleansing oxygen—improving circulation, releasing tension and helping to organize postural alignment of the skeleton.

C O N C E N T R A T I O N

Be present. Your body and mind are a team. Focus your mind on what your body is doing and give every exercise your full attention. Honing your kinesthetic awareness will help you to reeducate your muscles and reduce injury and imbalances stemming from bad posture and repetitive motion.

C E N T E R I N G

Stabilize and initiate movement from the supportive muscles near the skeletal frame and the deep abdominal muscles. Joseph Pilates referred to this as working from a strong core or "girdle of strength." And whether it's called the core, the powerhouse or simply the gut— the center is the safest and most effective starting place for movement, and focusing on it will transform how you move.

C O N T R O L

The most challenging and most important principle, control keeps movements from being careless or hazardous. Do not use momentum to move the body—concentrate, breath and use your core to initiate and complete each movement with precision. Mastering control will help you get the most out of this method of training as well as prevent injury.

P R E C I S I O N

Pilates emphasizes quality over quantity. Precision is what makes Pilates so efficient—a single perfect and precise Pilates move is more beneficial than 50 crunches powered out.

F L O W

Strive to make your movements slow and fluid. Once you've mastered the exercises, you'll find that one movement will flow smoothly into the next. Your movement and breath flow through your body releasing tension—the rhythm establishes grace, increases flexibility and has meditative benefits.

FREQUENTLY USED PILATES CUES

Verbal cues are used throughout Pilates sessions to help students execute movements with accuracy and precision. Learn these terms and visualization techniques to support your practice.

WHAT YOU HEAR	WHAT IT MEANS
<i>Keep a neutral pelvis</i>	A neutral pelvis maintains the spine's natural shape. All three bones of the pelvis should be on the same plane. Be careful not to flatten-out or over-arch the curve in your lower back by tilting your pelvis.
<i>Drop the sitz bones</i>	The sitz bones are the knobs on the bottom of your pelvis—to locate them sit on a hard chair and feel them poking down. Let the sitz bones slowly drop toward the mat when lying down to encourage a neutral spine.
<i>Scoop (navel to spine)</i>	Scoop your stomach by gently pulling your belly button toward your back. Start just above your pubic bone and work through all layers of the abdominal muscles—creating a deep valley between your pubic bone and the bottom of your ribs.
<i>Make a c-curve</i>	Bring the navel toward your spine, creating a C-shape with your back. Keep your eyes on your pubic bone. To avoid collapsing into your ribs, pretend to curve over a ball.
<i>Articulate the spine</i>	Roll up or down the spine one vertebra at a time. Visualize each segment of the spine imprinting into the mat as you roll down.
<i>Zipper your thighs</i>	Envision pulling up a zipper as you press your legs together, squeezing the thighs and pulling the sitz bones toward one another.
<i>Legs in tabletop</i>	Lie on your back and raise your legs to a 90-degree angle from your body. Then bend your knees so your calves are at a 90-degree angle to your thighs.
<i>Lengthen your legs</i>	Stretch your muscles without tensing or pointing your feet. Keep your hips even. Imagine someone gently pulling your legs by the ankles.
<i>Feet in Pilates stance</i>	Create a V with your feet by pulling your heels together, keeping your toes a few inches apart. This external rotation of the entire leg should be initiated from the hip joints and not the feet.
<i>Activate the muscles</i>	Keep your muscles working. When your legs are in the air, keep navel to spine and press your arms into the mat. On the equipment, don't let the straps and springs do the work... use your muscles, consciously pulling and resisting the springs.
<i>Chin to chest</i>	Lengthen the neck and curl the head toward your chest—but don't let the chin actually touch. Imagine an egg or tennis ball rested between your chin and chest.
<i>Core control</i> <i>Work from the inside out</i> <i>Move with your belly</i>	Pilates is about stabilizing and initiating movement from your core. As you start each movement, concentrate on this area—co-contracting the pelvic floor, the deep abdominals and the muscles that support the spine..
<i>Tighten your seatbelt</i>	Imagine a seatbelt across your lower abdominals and focus your attention on tightening that area. This is helpful imagery that activates lower abdominal muscles and your pelvic floor.
<i>Lace up your corset</i> <i>Stitch the ribs</i>	To maintain proper alignment and work the upper muscles of the core, envision stitching the ribs together or lacing up a corset.
<i>Work in opposition</i>	Balance the body by gently lengthening in opposite directions. The effort of working in opposition builds stabilization and makes each movement a whole-body exercise.

PAIN: PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY'S SIGNALS

People often overlook pain signals their bodies are giving them and don't take appropriate action soon enough... resulting in more serious injuries. Be vigilant to the signs your body provides.

PAIN RECOGNITION: GOOD PAIN VERSUS BAD PAIN

Start each Pilates session with mental focus and concentration... pay attention to what your body is telling you. Abdominal soreness is common in Pilates work while a sharp pain in the lower back likely indicates that you are doing an exercise incorrectly and may be in danger of injury.

SO, HOW DOES ONE TELL THE DIFFERENCE?

Essentially, good pain is a moderate to strong burning sensation in the muscles you are working while bad pain tends to be a sharp, shooting and electric feeling in the muscles or a deep, throbbing or aching sensation in the joints (often accompanied by swelling).

GOOD PAIN

During session

- Muscular fatigue
- Moderate burning sensation in the muscle during workout
- Pain during stretching that ceases shortly after you release the stretch
- Painless "creaking" noises in the joints (but watch for swelling or pain either during the exercise or post-workout)

After session

- Muscular soreness or discomfort the day after a challenging workout, which decreases as you keep moving or after taking a hot shower or bath

Good pain is a sign that you are gaining strength and flexibility while bad pain indicates that rest and possible attention from a healthcare professional is needed. Bad pain can lead to bad movement patterns, which are hard to break. And even a good pain can be bad when it lingers beyond 36 hours.

BAD PAIN

During session

- Electric or hot sharp, shooting, or radiating pain
- Sensations of pins and needles or any numbness
- Burning sensation in the muscle that hurts when touched
- Pain at the end of ranges of movement or limiting range of motion, particularly in muscles not targeted
- Persistent pinching in the spine or any joint
- Painful 'creaking' noises in the joints

After session

- Deep, persistent aching in the muscles or joints
- Swelling or redness around any joints
- Painful sensations that you can easily and consistently recreate through movement or touch
- Localized pain that is tender to the touch, with or without movement
- Any pain that has lasted for more than 36 to 48 hours and limits activity of daily living

REACTING TO PAIN: HEED THE SIGNS

If you experience pain during your Pilates session and you think it is more than exertion of the muscles you are targeting, speak up – a slight adjustment in form may solve the problem. If not, an adjustment in the routine may be the next step. As with any physical activity, when there is bad pain—or a good pain that just won't go away it may be time to avoid that particular exercise, take a longer rest break or seek advice from a healthcare professional.

**PILATES IS JUST AS MUCH AN EXERCISE OF THE MIND AS IT IS AN EXERCISE OF THE BODY—
PRACTICE WITH FOCUS AND CONTROL, AND BE MINDFUL OF THE MESSAGES YOUR BODY SENDS
TO PREVENT INJURY AND RESULTING DOWNTIME.**