

Pilates and Physical Therapy

Pilates is a method of exercise based on the premise that all parts of the body are interconnected, and works best when the whole body and mind are involved. Joseph Pilates developed this method of exercising – originally called “Contrology” - from his own experiences with Yoga, martial arts, Zen meditation, and Greek and Roman exercise. He was continually evolving the exercises to suit the needs of his clients. He left behind a core series of exercises from which all Pilates today is based. Today Pilates is a generic term that can be categorized into Classical Pilates- the original exercises designed by Joe; Evolved Pilates- practiced by many physical therapists and Pilates studios; and Pilates-based exercises taught in many fitness centers.

There are many different Pilates teacher-certification programs that run the gamut from one-day seminars at a fitness convention to 600-plus hour teacher training certification with written, practical, and teaching testing. The more experienced programs train instructors to address people’s individual body quirks. It is important to understand your needs and find an appropriate Pilates teacher/facility.

Pilates exercises are accessible to everybody - from the spectrum of a very de-conditioned person to an elite athlete, because the exercises can be regressed and progressed easily. There are over 500 exercises in the Pilates repertoire; workouts can be fresh and exciting.

Pilates exercises can be done on several types of apparatus including the reformer, Cadillac, barrel, and various chairs- the electric chair, high chair and low chair. The mat-based exercises often utilize props like foam rollers, Pilates rings, small balls, arcs, and bands.

The Pilates method encourages movement early in rehab by the use of springs for assistance. It is useful for many different problems from general orthopedic problems, people with balance and coordination problems, and general de-conditioning. It was originally used by ballet dancers to rehab from injuries faster.

When using Pilates in a rehab environment, the first stage of rehab is stabilizing the area. This usually involves learning core control and trunk stability- as the trunk becomes strong and stable, the extremities can move more freely and with more power. People involved in rotational sports (lacrosse, baseball, tennis, golf, etc) can get benefit from leaning to initiate the movements from the core.

The second stage of rehab is mobilization. Once the core strength is developed, mobilization of the affected joints and muscles can be greatly enhanced by the use of Pilates equipment to assist, resist, and facilitate correct movement patterns in different positions.

From mobilization the patient moves on to dynamic mobility- challenging the newly patterned mobility and stability in a more functional and gravity dependent environment, and finally back to sport, hobby, recreation or exercise without pain or instability.

Whether you are in need of rehab for an injury, wanting to work on your balance and coordination, looking to improve your power and control, or just trying to get fit, Pilates can work for you.

Submitted by Nancy Sawyer, PTA, Certified Pilates Instructor