

PILATES HAS COME OF AGE

By Miriam Richter

What is the Pilates (Puh-LAH-teez) or the Pilates Method? It is a system of exercises designed to create strength without bulk, to increase flexibility, balance, and to facilitate the mind-body connection. The Method has been altered some as we have come to understand more of human anatomy and physiology; however it has remained largely intact.



People of all ages and fitness levels can do Pilates exercises. The list of benefits is long and impressive: it creates longer, leaner muscles, it helps to improve posture, it increases core strength and stability, it helps prevent injury, increases functional fitness, increases concentration and body awareness, it is non-impact, it complements other

forms of exercise, it enhances sports performance, and improves balance and coordination.

Joseph Pilates began developing the Pilates Method of exercise as a young man in the early 1900s. He was born in 1880 in Germany where various illnesses left him delicate as a child. He overcame his frail condition and became an accomplished athlete combining Eastern and Western forms of exercise. Pilates moved to England where he worked as a boxer, circus performer, and self-defense instructor. During WWI he was imprisoned on the Isle of Man along with other German Nationals; there he continued to improve his "Method" by creating a unique system using bedsprings and pulleys to help non-ambulatory patients gain strength and flexibility. This system became the basis for his equipment and for his own style of conditioning. Pilates moved to the United States in 1926 and opened his Pilates Studio in New York City. Joe Pilates continued to train dancers, athletes, actors and non-athletes until his death in 1967.

Pilates movements are fluid in nature and lengthening in structure. They can be done in groups on the floor (mat classes) or individually using Pilates equipment to assist movements. The primary pieces of equipment are the Reformer and the Cadillac or Trap Table, which remain faithful in design to the original machines. Pilates developed over 500 exercises, which incorporate eight movement principles:

- **Concentration**
- **Centering- using the "powerhouse" or core abdominal muscles**
- **Breathing**
- **Control = mental + physical**
- **Precision of movement**
- **Fluidity of movement**
- **Isolation of movement**
- **Routine - at least twice a week leads to greater results.**

The name "Pilates" has been owned privately since Joe Pilates death, until recently when a court decided that Pilates is a form of exercise, like Yoga, and as such is general domain. Before that decision the only way to become a Pilates instructor was to undergo rigorous training that included long hours of study and an extensive internship. Now certifications can range from months of study to weekend seminars. The prospective student should investigate a teacher/studio carefully and look for instructors who are certified, have taken some internship hours, and have sat for an examination. It is an added bonus if the instructor has a background in dance, rehabilitation, or the health field.

The Pilates Method can teach you mental and physical balance. It can take time to perfect but it can improve the quality of your life. It is amazing to realize that one of the hottest fitness crazes today is over eighty years old! Pilates has truly come of age.

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