

Beware of FALSE GODS

By Miriam Richter

Someone recently told me that their chiropractor would not advise Pilates for his 40+ clients because they came back to him injured. The problem is overrated and under-qualified Pilates instructors not Pilates. This is my number one Pilates pet peeve! Think about it, if you take a class from an under-certified instructor and if there are thirty or forty people in that class, what is the chance that someone will be injured? The Pilates name was tightly regulated until 2000 when courts decreed that the Pilates name should not be copyright protected or regulated but was simply a form of exercise like yoga. Prior to that ruling a Pilates certification required an exhausting period of study and apprenticeship. The Pilates industry has exploded since that court decision and certifications are as easy to come by as fishing licenses, they can even be obtained on the internet. Joseph Pilates must be spinning in his grave!

A high-quality Pilates certification requires, in part, study of anatomy, physiology and the science of movement, plus a lengthy internship. What makes these instructors so special is that they are well taught and well trained. OK, but why should I pay for Pilates classes, you ask, when my gym offers them free? You shouldn't, if the instructor is Pilates certified through a recognized agency and if the class is small, no more than ten students per instructor. Good luck finding that in a large gym! Most large gyms are all about the bottom line, money, so often they don't watch closely who is teaching their Pilates classes or limit how many folks attend those classes. The other issue is that gyms almost exclusively offer mat, the hardest form of Pilates to master. Unhappily, seeking out a small Pilates studio still does not guarantee that your instructor will be well trained. It would be a different matter if there were a national certification for Pilates instructors requiring both written and practical exams, but sadly, there is not. Consequently, someone who wrote his/her own certification might run that quaint little Pilates studio you have found! The Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) is the only agency currently offering a written exam recognized nationally, but physicians, personal trainers and health professionals, as well as trained Pilates professionals, can sit for the exam. Still this is a step in the right direction.

Pilates does not have to be expensive; training with a partner is less expensive than one-on-one sessions. Some studios offer small group classes in mat and/or equipment at a fraction of the cost of private instruction. Investigate before you commit. Visit several studios in your area to see if the atmosphere has good energy and to be sure that you are compatible with the instructors. Ask about the instructor's certification(s) and experience. Watch some classes to see how the instructor teaches. Does she/he walk around the class observing and correcting when necessary? Inquire if you can observe an instructor teaching a private session. Talk to the instructor(s) about your goals to make sure that you both are on the same page. The Pilates Method Alliance has some additional guidelines for anyone investigating a Pilates program:

1. Are the instructors trained through a comprehensive training program?
2. Did that training program require a written and practical test, lecture, observation, practice and apprentice hours?
3. How many total hours were spent in the training program? (The Pilates Method is a knowledge-based method of exercise and training. Time spent in certification training produces qualified teachers.)
4. Does the instructor have any other movement related teaching experience?
5. How long have the instructors been teaching Pilates?
6. What is the instructor's/ studio's philosophy and specialty? Are they able to handle special needs, injuries and rehabilitation?
7. Does the instructor or studio teach the full repertoire of Pilates on all pieces of apparatus?

If you are determined to stick with your gym or home videos, seek out a well-trained professional for a few classes so that you know what you are doing and can avoid injury. The bottom line is, ask questions, ask questions and ask questions!

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