

Pilates - Fitness and Harmony

An effective trend that has caused excitement amongst athletes, stars and dancers, by 'wellness' expert Anika Hölting



It is more than just fitness, more than mental training – Pilates is a philosophy.

This training is one of the most popular methods to provide the body with more balance and flexibility regardless of your age.

This is a gentle way to tone your figure, but you will also see and feel improvement in your posture, co-ordination, breathing, concentration and endurance.

It all began with the life story of one man called Joseph Pilates (1880-1967). Since his youth the German born artist and boxer had lived in England. A sports fanatic who was practically obsessed with the topic of fitness.

During World War I he was detained on the Isle of Man and decided to make it his mission to assist and support the rehabilitation of those injured. In 1926 he emigrated to the United States of America and in New York City opened the first Pilates studio; it was a combination of his collected wisdom about fitness, gymnastics and rehabilitation combined with the mental concentration and breathing techniques of yoga.

The primary objective of Pilates exercises is the strengthening of the deep torso musculature in the areas of belly, pelvis and hips – simply described it is the stabilising of the body's centre. Thus Pilates called the basic structure the 'active powerhouse'.

When we perform these special exercises we help to give ourselves better, more upright posture, stability of the inner organs and more flexibility in the spine.

It is important that each individual part of each exercise be done diligently in order to improve the interplay of the muscles. This can assist in reducing pain in the spine and hip joints caused by muscle weakness.

The basic movement, the 'active powerhouse':

The powerhouse is what differentiates every Pilates exercise from regular muscle training and is a prerequisite before beginning the following exercises:

Lay down on your back and keep your legs bent, the arms should be relaxed, lying near the torso. Pull in your bellybutton deep in the direction of the spine so that the lower back has contact with the floor/mat. At the same time begin to tense the buttocks. For this exercise hold the tension for ten sec-

onds and then relax. Repeat this exercise five times.

Pilates Breathing:

For a 'dry run' I recommend you place the hands, relaxed, on the lower sides of your rib cage.

Inhale: Slowly and gently inhale through your nose and direct the movement of the breath towards your hands.

Exhale: Breath out through your mouth. The rib cage compresses as if the ribs were trying to push together.

Repeat this breathing technique for two minutes. This will help you relax, forget about the day and prepare you for the upcoming training.

What you need for Pilates:

Be sure to set aside a good 15 minutes daily for the Pilates basic exercise programme.

In addition you will need a good gym mat, comfortable clothing and relaxing, atmospheric music – now we're ready to start!

Important before you start the Pilates training:

■ When completing the exercises be sure to pay attention to the 'guidelines' in order to avoid injuries.

■ If you have any trouble performing the exercises, especially those centred on the back, I would recommend that you speak to your doctor.

■ It is best to have last eaten at least one hour before starting the exercises.

■ Warm up for about 5 minutes, by circling and moving the arms and legs for example, on a trampoline or with a quick walk or run.

■ Avoid too much stress on the body/muscles and accept the limits your body sets. Take breaks when necessary and then start up again where you left off.

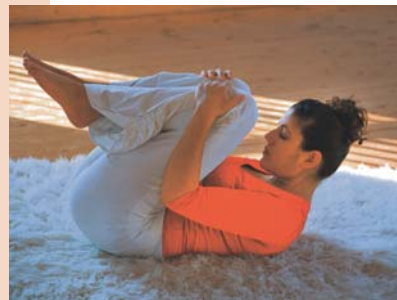
My recommendation for your Pilates basic programme:

Relaxation Examples:

Ending your Pilates exercise programme:

Grab your knees pulling them towards the chest, but relax and keep your spine flat on the floor. On the exhale gently pull your head toward the knees and hold this position for 5 deep breaths.

Afterward lay flat on the floor, relax and concentrate on your body.



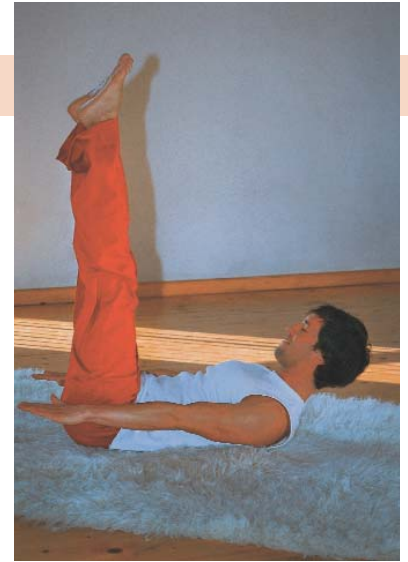
The Hundred:



Start by lying on your back positioning your spine flat on the floor. Pull up the thighs with bent knees until the toes are higher than the knees. Using the active powerhouse raise the head and shoulders. The arms should float just over the floor.



For beginners: Raise and lower the arms (height as shown on the photo). Gently inhale and exhale five times each, each cycle of breathing should be accompanied by 10 arm movements.



For advanced: Do this exercise with the legs stretched upward towards the ceiling. The arm movements remain the same.

Roll Down:



Starting position is sitting upright, legs out level with the hips, soles of the feet remaining in contact with the floor. The pubic bone remains in contact with the floor, meaning that during the exercise the buttocks will not raise off the floor. Straighten up the spine so that bottom and rib cage are upright and keep the elbows as far away from one another as possible.



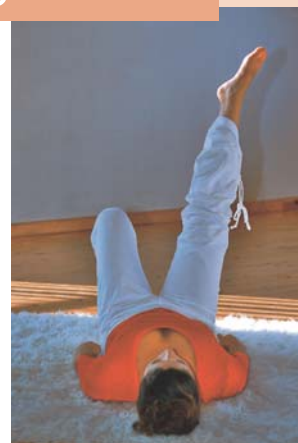
Beginners: You can use your hands on your thighs to help support yourself during the exercise, but the power in the movement should be coming from the powerhouse!
Advanced: Take the hands slightly away from the legs and during the exercise let them glide past the thighs on the side. Hold the lower position of the exercise for three full breaths, then return to the start position and repeat the exercise five times.

Pull in the bellybutton, contract the buttocks and bring the lower part of the hips in contact with the floor. The spine is now forming a 'C', keep your eyes on your navel.

Single Leg Circles:



Lying flat on your back, raise the right leg vertically towards the ceiling and keep the left with bent knee on the floor. Keep the arms relaxed at the body's sides.



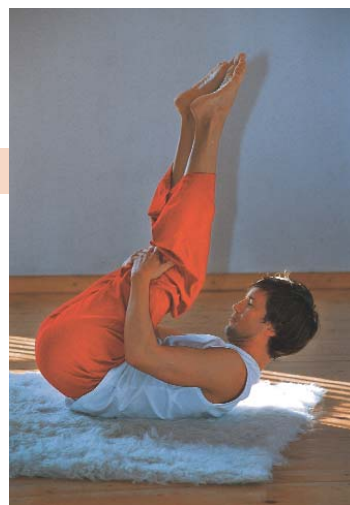
Start contracting the powerhouse. With the right knee moving outward towards the right shoulder slowly move the right leg in a circle. Return to the starting position. Inhale and keep both hips on the floor for the whole exercise.

Repeat the exercise both clockwise and anti-clockwise five times and then change over to the left side.

Advanced: Keep the resting leg stretched out on the floor for the exercise. Only do this part of the exercise if you can really do it in its entirety without raising the hips/buttocks from the floor.



Keep the legs even with the hips, outstretched and grab them above the knee on the backside of the leg. Lean a bit backwards with the upper torso. Balance! The lower back will be rounded, and as always the bellybutton should be pulled in toward the spine.



Rolling Like A Ball:

Inhale and at the same time roll very slowly (and with the muscles tensed) vertebrae for vertebrae backward, making sure each one contacts the floor. Eyes should be directed toward the belly and the elbows are pointing outwards.

Roll backward until the shoulder blades make contact with the floor. The head does not touch the floor. Exhale and return to the starting position. Repeat this exercise six to ten times.