

Strength and suppleness

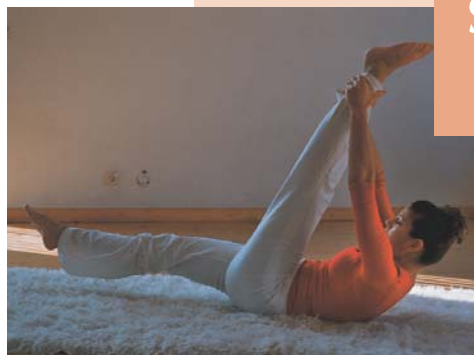
An effective trend that has caused excitement amongst athletes, stars and dancers, by 'wellness' expert Anika Hölting

In this issue of IbizaNOW I am going to introduce some more exercises to continue the Pilates exercise programme for beginners that we started in the March number.

As I said then all I can offer is a mere sample of the innumerable Pilates exercises. This means that according to your individual needs and your level of fitness new exercises and variations of old ones can always be integrated into your programme.

The following exercises are based on last month's exercises as a foundation. They require a certain basic stability of your powerhouse (your abdominal muscles – cf. March issue p. 62) in its basic position: pull in your belly-button as deeply as possible to give stability to your abdomen in all conceivable movements.

But before you start on any of the more energetic exercises you should warm up thoroughly with some dynamic exercises like circular movements with outstretched arms and/or legs, plus stretching of legs, arms and abdominal, chest and back muscles. ■



Single straight Leg Stretch

Aim: Strengthening of abdominal muscles through greater leverage

1. Starting position: Lie on your back. Bend both legs, grasping each shin with one hand. Lift head and shoulders by tightening stomach muscles.

Inhale: Stretch left leg pointing towards head, stretch out right leg without touching the floor.

Exhale twice quickly: grasp left leg with both hands and pull towards you (repeat twice).

Inhale: Same exercise, using the other leg. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

Mind: elbows pointing outwards all the time, keep legs straight, roughly in line with the length of your body. Avoid sideways movements of body.

If you find it impossible to reach your ankles, instead touch the inside of your knees gently with your hands.

2. Give your back a short break, and relax your lower back muscles by pulling your knees to your stomach.



Single Leg Stretch



Aim: As in every exercise, strengthening of the inner abdominal muscles, plus stretching of the muscles on the back (dorsal) side of your legs and your buttocks through the pulling movements involved.

1. Starting position: lie on your back, arms parallel to your body
2. Lift head and shoulders, pull chin to chest. Keep shoulders relaxed and in contact with the floor / gym mat, elbows pointing outwards. Lift right leg to ca. 45° from the floor. Bend left leg and put your hands round your knee, then pull your knee towards your chest (cf. picture)

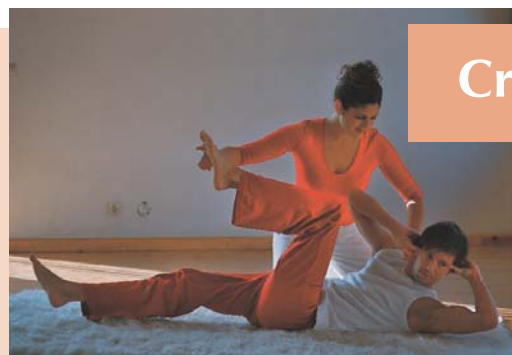
Start this exercise in the following way:

Inhale: Pull left leg, right leg alternately to your chest; hand position as above

Exhale: Again, pull left leg, right leg alternately towards your torso.

In other words: two leg movements for each breathing phase. Mind you breathe slowly and deliberately.

Mind: During this exercise your pelvis remains pressed to the floor. Try to keep your body in one straight line, without bending it to either side.



Criss-cross

Aim: This exercise is designed to strengthen your diagonal stomach muscles. It resembles the traditional pedalling exercise, but in its Pilates variety it is a much slower and more flowing movement performed synchronously with your breathing rhythm.

1. Keep lying on your back, pull up your legs and place your hands under your head. Make sure you keep your lower back firmly pressed to the floor and to pull in your stomach. Raise head and shoulders.

2. Inhale: Straighten your left leg towards the ceiling, turn your torso and shoulders to the left, so that right elbow and left knee approach each other, as if attracted magnetically. **Exhale:** Change legs, right leg and left elbow touch. Lower back stays pressed to the floor all through the exercise. Repeat exercise 3-5 times for each side.

Mind you do not allow your body to roll towards either side during the exercise. Should you find that your back aches leave this exercise out.

Spine Twist



Transition from lying on your back to sitting with stretched-out legs: pull up one leg, grasp your knee with both your hands and pull yourself up. Here, as always when changing postures, make sure your powerhouse is tensed, your belly-button pulled inwards!

Aim: greater tautness of rump and leg muscles. Extension of muscles on the back of your legs and of muscles running parallel to your backbone.

1. Sitting with legs stretched:

Straighten the complete length of your backbone before you start this exercise: The lowest vertebrae keep contact with the ground, the lower third of the spine is straight and firm in position through the taut muscles of your abdomen; straighten its middle section by pushing the breastbone upwards and pulling your shoulder-blades together towards your spine.

Your legs are as straight as possible and placed in parallel. If you find that impossible, bend your knees slightly. The main thing is you keep your back straight. Keep in this posture for three deep breaths.

2. Now start the exercise:

Inhale: Lift arms shoulder-high, palms pointing downwards

Exhale: Turn your rump to one side, at about the level of your waist, keeping hips and heels down. Extend chest upwards.

3. Go back to starting position. Check your posture, and repeat exercise turning to the other side. Repeat exercise 3-5 times for each side.

Mind: If you are suffering from acute back pain, leave this exercise out. If you feel pain in your shoulders and the upper part of your back carry on with this exercise until you feel the pain, then stop.

Spine Stretch

Aim: this is a supporting exercise for the lower back, it also improves mobility of complete backbone while keeping up abdominal tension. Movement should be easy and flowing.

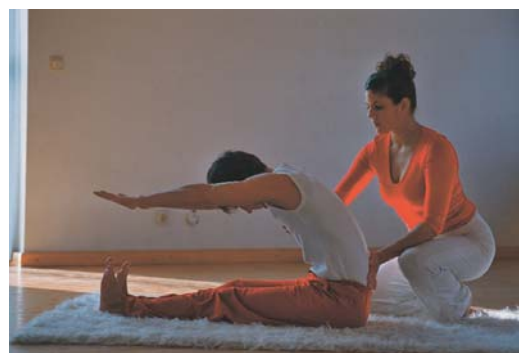
1. Start as in Spine Twist, except that your legs are slightly apart, knees bent to begin with so that you can concentrate on the movement in your spine. Arms are stretched forward shoulder-high

2. Imagine your back were glued to a wall.

Exhale: lower your head between your upper arms. The upper part of your back arches forward, the lower part remains glued to the imaginary wall. Pull your belly-button inwards, and up, so that you extend your lower back even more

Inhale: Straighten your back slowly. Check your posture, and repeat exercise 5 times. Advanced Straighten your knees and carry out exercise as described above. The lower part of your back should always remain straight.

NB: Should you find the tension on your back uncomfortable, you should only attempt small-scale movements. Repeat 5 times. Turn over and lie on your stomach



Swimming



Aim: Strengthening of your lower back muscles and stretching of (frequently shortened) abdominal muscles.

1. Lie on your stomach, arms and legs extended to full length, palms flat on the floor, heels turned inwards, toes pointing outwards.

Tense up your powerhouse: pull belly-button inwards and up (picture no. 1)

2. Breathe normally during the whole of this exercise. Lift your head, then – still fully extended – your left leg and right arm. Head stays in position aligned with your back, facing downwards. Start moving arms and legs up and down, diagonally and alternately left arm, right leg; then right arm and left leg.

Keep your muscles taut! Slowly increase speed of movements. Repeat 10 to 20 times

Relaxing

Finally, take up a relaxing posture with the help of your training partner or personal trainer: Squat on your heels, cross your arms and bend torso forward. Your back should form a straight line (cf. person on the left in the picture); eyes facing downwards. Stay in this position for some moments, focus your perception on the extension of your body, and listen to the changes which your body is undergoing during this exercise.

For every Pilates exercise produces change. ■