

Pilates meets yoga

By wellness expert Annika Hölting

In this, the third and last part of our series on Pilates, we are taking a new path: Yogilates – yoga exercises in combination with Pilates. I also want to build on past material to explain further strengthening exercises.

As always your basis is the Powerhouse. Tense the muscles in your abdomen and pull your bellybutton down towards the spine, pulling your belly very flat in the process.

This stabilises the torso and will enable you to smoothly execute the exercises.

Our goal is balance and to isolate specific muscles. All of the strength you need comes solely from the Powerhouse!

1. You begin in the Side Kick position whereby the upper arm is brought in very close to the body.

2. Press both legs and heels firmly together, toes point outward. Take a moment to consciously tighten the abdomen.

Exhale: Raise the legs from the starting position upward without losing the

'boomerang' shape. Hold the position for three seconds and then lower the legs in a slow, controlled movement. Inhale.

Repeat this exercise 5 times.

Important: Do not support your weight on your hand, as the strength should be coming from the middle of your body! First do all of the Side Kick variations on one side, then change to the other and repeat them all.

Side kicks



Starting position:

Before starting any of the exercises from the side get yourself into the following position:

1. Lay comfortably down on your left side: The body creates a straight line from head to toe, the hips and shoulders lie parallel to one another.

The right hand is placed in front of the chest on the floor, the left supports the head. Feet are in the Pilates position: Toes point away from one another, heels together.

2. Inhale: relax into the Powerhouse, lift both legs just off the floor.

Exhale: Move the legs forward keeping them together to approximately a 45° angle to your torso. Rest the legs on the floor, but do not relax your abs! You are now in the starting position for the following Side Kick variations.

Important: If you should experience pain in your arm from supporting your head, or in the shoulders, lay the arm on the floor extending the line the torso makes and rest your head upon it.



Our goal is to create balance, stretch the muscles at the back of the leg and to strengthen the buttocks.

1. From the Side Kick starting position raise the upper leg slightly.

2. Inhale: Bring the upper leg forward slowly and as far as possible. Try to keep it parallel to the floor and your hips.

3. Exhale: Bring your leg into the starting position again and try to keep your buttocks tensed.

Repeat this exercise 5-10 times.

The Downward Dog

Our goal is the strengthening of the shoulder girdle and the lower back and stretching of the whole of the rear leg.

1. Go down into a four-legged position. Hands and feet should be shoulder or hip-wide apart.

2. Exhale: Press upwards with your abdominal muscles through the arms and legs.

At this point it is important that the lower part of your back is kept in a straight line. Try to move your tailbone towards the ceiling, but the upper part of your hips towards the thighs. Leave your knees bent and your heels off the ground. Keep your eyes focused on a spot between your hands. Pull in your shoulder blades and straighten out at the sternum. Hold this position for 3-4 breaths and then relax back into the four-legged position.

3. Repeat and carefully allow your heels to move towards the floor so that your calves will feel more of a stretch. You know your limits.



Jack knife

Our goal is absolute control of the body. Simultaneously this is a good stamina test to see if you can really hold the Pilates position.

Important starting note: The exercise movement should be slow and controlled – keep your muscles taught!

If you have severe problems in the neck area or a slipped disc then be sure to skip this exercise!

There are two variations for arm placement:

a) **Beginners:** Place your hands under your hips and bring the elbows as close to the body as possible.

b) **Advanced:** The arms lay flat, parallel to the body. Pull the shoulder blades in towards the spine and stretch your neck.

1. Lie on your back. First raise the legs, bent at a right angle, to create a right angle to the upper body. Tense the abdominals and pull in your bellybutton (Photo, person at the back) Then stretch the legs out towards the ceiling keeping your hips on the ground (Photo, person in front)

2. Inhale: Raise your hips with the Powerhouse. Bring your legs over your head until they are parallel to the floor. Your shoulder blades must remain on the ground but the neck remains stretched long. Stay in this position for 3-5 breaths. Feel the stretch in the spine and keep the muscles tense in your legs and belly.

3. Raise your hips higher and stretch your feet in the direction of the ceiling until the feet are at the same level as your eyes (looking up). Your hands support your body at the waist. Your buttocks keep the tension! Legs are also firm, heels together.

4. Slowly and controlled, roll down vertebra by vertebra until the legs once again make a right angle to the floor.

5. Start the exercise over from this position and repeat 3-5 times.



Scissors

Our goal is a stable torso posture and stretching of the often shortened hip flexors.



a) Start as we did for the Jack Knife. The legs are perpendicular to the floor, knees stretched, arms at your sides. Stretch out the neck. Tense the abdomen and pull the belly button down deep.

b) Using your body's strength slowly pull the hips and legs towards the ceiling until they are in an upright position. Support the movement with your arms by putting your hands on your waist.

c) Inhale: Open your legs like a pair of scissors. Keep the leg muscles tensed and open them as far as you can, keep your Powerhouse going – your leg should be somewhat past your head when the position is fully opened. The arms support your weight, not the neck and head.

d) Exhale: Slowly switch the



legs' positions with the torso remaining strong. Repeat this on each side 3-4 times.

e) To recover come slowly back into the start position. Do this by rolling back down vertebra by vertebra in a controlled fashion.

4. b) **Playful Scissors** Our goal is an additional stretching of the back of the leg.

You can also play with this variation by, for example, keeping one leg stretched upright while bringing the other as far down as you can, over your head.

It is important to keep control through the Powerhouse. Repeat this for each leg 3-4 times.



Ending Relaxation – 10 minute journey



Choose soothing music as an accompaniment.

Lay down on your back. Stretch out your arms and legs to a comfortable position a bit away from each other, feet on the floor. Concentrating, focus on the soles of your feet. Clearly sense where exactly they

contact the floor. Wander with your concentration up along the legs, the hips, abdomen and back, relaxing as you go. Continue along on this journey by relaxing the shoulder girdle and your facial and jaw muscles. Consciously let the weight of

your shoulders sink into the floor. Slightly open your mouth and put the tip of your tongue on your gums behind the incisors. Now 'listen' to your body and feel the changes brought on by the Pilates exercises. After your journey, remain there and enjoy the placidity.