

Pilates Method Exercise Tips

If you read the paper, browse online or watch television, you've heard of the Pilates Method of body conditioning. If you've ever had a fitness club membership, you've probably been offered the opportunity to practice Pilates. Perhaps you've shied away from the program, thinking it's too intense or simply too difficult. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Developed by Joseph Pilates to help camp detainees during the First World War, the Pilates Method is a form of exercise that targets the powerhouse of the body, including the abdominal, buttocks and lower back. In building this strong "core", the rest of the body enjoys full freedom of movement. More than a form of exercise, the Pilates Method is a series of controlled movements that promote strength and flexibility. Over time, the Pilates Method gained momentum, and it is still the darling of fitness programs for the social elite.

Today, there are more than 500 exercises involved in the complete Pilates Method. Each of these exercises was carefully developed and maintained with one goal: to strengthen and condition the body. Whereas the coveted Pilates Method exercises were once available to only the rich and famous, they have since been disclosed for the entire world to enjoy.

While your best option for getting the greatest health benefits from Pilates is still through a qualified trainer, it is possible to try some of the exercises in the privacy of your home. Here is a sample of Pilates Method Exercises that you can try. These exercises cover the core principles of the Pilates approach:

Breathing and Hollowing

The most basic of the Pilates Method exercises teach you how to use the transverse, which is the deepest of your abdominal muscles. This is the muscle that you can use to pull in your belly. The best way to train this muscle is to simply breathe. Hollowing, on the other hand, is the act of deflating the belly by using the transverse abdominal muscles. This step is used to initiate every Pilates exercise. To practice Breathing and Hollowing, lie on your back with bent legs. Place your hands one inch below the navel on both sides. Next, simply inhale and exhale using your breath, and create a "hollow" by sinking your belly toward the sacrum.

Bridging

This Pilates Method exercise uses the legs to lift the pelvis. Again, lie on your back on the mat, with your feet pressed to the floor and your knees bent. Lift your body to make a "bridge", raising the legs faster than the tailbone. You should feel your entire spine lift as one section.

Thigh Lift

To complete a "thigh lift", simply lie on your back with parallel legs bent and feet in the floor. Place your hands upon the femoral folds. Then, inhale and breathe deeply, into the back of your body. Exhale to deflate your abdominal muscles in, and lift your bent right leg. Inhale, and lower the right thigh back to its original position. Exhale with a hollow, and lift the bent left thigh up to 90 degrees. Repeat for three more sets. Advance, hollow and alternate sides as you lift both bent legs up. Repeat three more times.

Spinal Flexion

Known as "the crunch" in modern exercise classes, this Pilates Method exercise is basically a shallow sit-up. Lie on your back with your legs bent, and placed parallel to each other. Interlock the fingers of both hands behind your head. Inhale, and feel your lower ribs broaden and lengthen on the floor as you breathe. Exhale, hollow, and sink your lower ribs into the floor as your head lifts from the floor. Then, return the spine back to the floor by matching the length of the front ribs to that of the back ribs. Repeat this exercise three more times.

Rotation

The "rotation" is a Pilates Method exercise that involves other mat movements including the "saw" and "corkscrew". This exercise concentrates on the oblique muscles. On the mat, lie on your back with your legs parallel and bent. Place your hands in front of the pelvis. Then, inhale and gently drop your knees to the right. Exhale, hollow, and engage the left internal obliques to rotate your pelvis to its original position. Inhale, and gently drop your knees to the left. Repeat the second movement. Four more sets of this exercise should be completed.

This is just a sample of the hundreds of exercises that are involved in the Pilates Method. Give them a try. If you enjoy these movements, consider joining a class to learn more Pilates Method exercises. There's nothing stopping you!