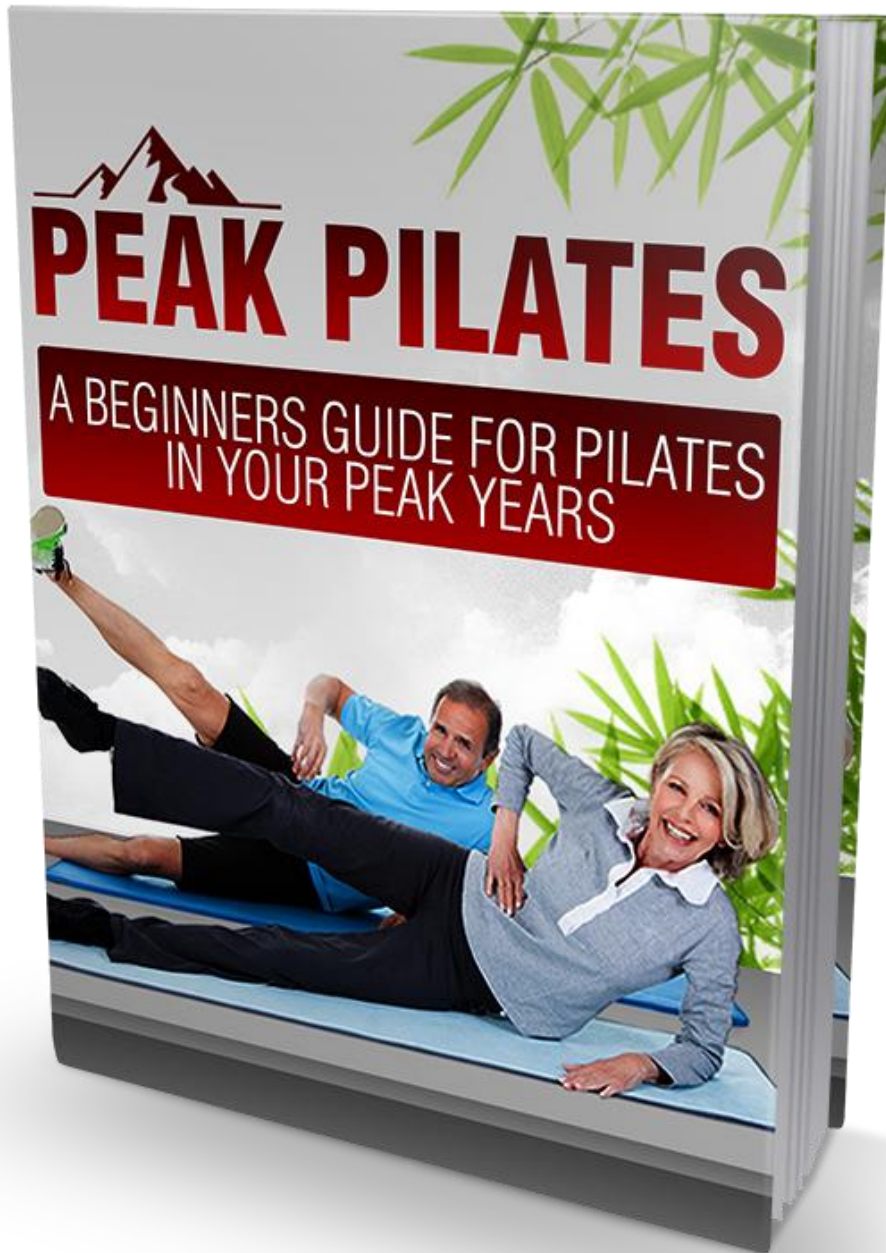


## Peak Pilates



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## Introduction

Pilates is one of the most popular forms of exercise all over the world. Millions of people swear by it and many have testified that after several sessions of Pilates, the aches and pains that used to plague them, diminished and disappeared.

Unlike other forms of training such as running, weight lifting, kickboxing, etc. Pilates is a low-impact exercise that most people can do well into their senior years. That makes it fantastic for older adults who wish to stay active and fit.

As one ages, the high-impact sports and activities that require a lot of exertion become torturous. The human body can only handle so much impact and training as it ages. We must change our style of training accordingly.

Most people, young and old, lead highly sedentary lifestyles. This inevitably leads to weaker bodies and misalignments. The muscles and joints are weaker due to lack of use. Like they say, if you don't use it, you'll lose it.

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The problem is exacerbated as one ages. Muscle atrophy, imbalances in the body, etc. can cause aches, pains and other degenerative health issues.

Pilates can remedy and even reverse many of these problems. It has stood the test of time (almost a hundred years) and despite being created in the 1920s, it's more popular than ever today.

*"If, at the age of 30, you are stiff and out of shape, you are old.  
If, at 60, you are supple and strong, then you are young."* -

**Joseph Pilates**

# Chapter 1 – Discover How Activity Promotes Longevity

It goes without saying that the more active you are, the healthier and fitter you will be. Studies have shown that regular exercise slows down the aging process and wards off diseases that may take root if you're not active.

When you exercise, your body engages the different muscle groups and also works your cardiovascular system. Your muscles get a workout and this tells the body to retain lean muscle to cope with the demands placed upon it.

A workout that is cardiovascular in nature gets you panting and breathing harder. This promotes blood circulation and deep breathing. Your lungs get stronger and your heart beats more efficiently.

What does all this translate to?

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Youthfulness, of course.

The fitness guru, Jack LaLanne, was extremely energetic and had a youthful nature well into his senior years. He once said, *"I do it as a therapy. I do it as something to keep me alive. We all need a little discipline. Exercise is my discipline."*

Exercise prevents heart disease, lowers cholesterol levels, cuts down your risk of stroke and much more. It is of paramount importance that you exercise regularly all the way into your senior years. In fact, your senior years are the most important time for you to be active.

Joseph Pilates said, *"We retire too early and we die too young, our prime of life should be in the 70's and old age should not come until we are almost 100."*



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Pilates is similar to Aikido in the sense that it is fluid and if you start doing it while you are young, you will actually get better as you age.

Since your body will slowly get stronger and healthier from the workouts, a Pilates practitioner in his 60s will be able to handle the demands of a Pilates session easily while someone in their 30s who has never done it before will struggle to execute the moves.

Such is the power and beauty of Pilates. Read on to find out how Pilates was created and what makes it so unique when compared to other training methods.

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*"In 10 sessions you will feel the difference, in 20 sessions you will see the difference, and in 30 you will have a new body."* -

**Joseph Pilates**

## Chapter 2 - The History of Pilates

Pilates is an exercise system that was created by Joseph Pilates, back in the 1920s. The main purpose of Pilates was to rehabilitate injured soldiers who had sustained wounds in World War 1.

Over the years, dancers started using Pilates to strengthen their bodies to cope with the rigorous demands of their constant dancing. Actors, celebrities and other athletes started using it too and its popularity skyrocketed.

The main reason that Pilates works so well with older people is because it is rehabilitative in nature. That's the goal of Pilates. Resistance training is about building muscle. Cardio training is for building stamina and accelerating weight loss.

Pilates is about rehabilitation and giving you a body that is healthy and youthful. Over and above rehabilitation, Pilates has several other goals such as:

- Making you more supple
- Improving your posture

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- Giving you a flatter midsection
- Correcting misalignments in your body
- Improving flexibility
- Retaining lean muscle and promoting muscle growth
- And much more

You will not find yourself gasping for breath and sweating like you just stepped out of a sauna. Pilates is not high intensity interval training.

You'll never struggle to grunt and lift weights till failure. Pilates is not weight training.

Pilates is a series of movements that involve coordination, mindful breathing and concentration. The moves are executed slowly and fluidly. There is a certain sense of rhythm involved and the goal is to train your body to work synergistically and efficiently.

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What makes Pilates so powerful is that it is tried and tested and PROVEN to work. There are many fad training systems that come and go but Pilates has stood the test of time.

Joseph Pilates suffered from asthma, rheumatic fever and rickets when he was a child. He wasn't exactly a picture of glowing health. However, in his early teens, he got started with body conditioning and improved his condition marvelously.

He also did gymnastics, boxing and even became a circus artiste. Joseph walked the talk and proved that his system worked. Later on when he was an orderly at a hospital, he used his methods to help patients who had difficulty walking.

His innovative nature saw him coming up with devices such as springs attached to hospital beds that would enable the patient to engage in resistance training.

The efficacy of Pilates has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. This explains why there are thousands of Pilates studios all over the world. It just works.

*"The Pilates Method teaches you to be in control of your body and not at its mercy."* - **Joseph Pilates**

## Chapter 3 - What Exactly Is Pilates? Should I Be Doing It?

Most seniors assume that they are too old to exercise. The truth of the matter is that you don't stop exercising because you grow old, but you grow old because you stop exercising.

Pilates is the complete coordination of mind, body and spirit. As you age, it will help you to take care of your body and strengthen it. After all, it's the only place you have to live in.

Joseph used to say, *"Take care of your body. Physical fitness can neither be achieved by wishful thinking nor outright purchase."*

This is very true. If you want good health, you definitely need to do Pilates. Old and young alike will benefit from it.

You may have noticed that many older people tend to be hunched over and have difficulty moving around. On the other hand there

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are other seniors who are well and capable of getting around easily. This is due to the strength of the midsection and back muscles. Usually, older people have weaker back muscles and this leads to back pain. Since the back muscles are weak, posture is compromised and they hunch.

The hunched posture places more stress on the spinal column which leads to even more pain. This is a vicious cycle that must be broken. One of the best ways to do this will be to use Pilates to strengthen the back muscles and also the midsection. Balance is crucial in Pilates.

If you want to feel young, energetic and free of pain, you need Pilates. It will tone your body and you will age gracefully. While you may not be young enough to do sprints at the running track, this is no reason to give up on exercise. Get started with Pilates and feel the difference.

*"Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do."*

**- Joseph Pilates**



## Chapter 4 - The Benefits of Pilates

There are a plethora of benefits that can be derived from engaging in Pilates sessions regularly. Most of the benefits come about because of the principles of Pilates.



Let's look at the different principles and see how they benefit you.

### **Control**

A ton of emphasis is placed on control. You'll never see a Pilates session where people swing around wildly. Pilates is all about

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slow, controlled movements. Joseph Pilates called it contrology and this is what he had to say about it.

*"Contrology is designed to give you suppleness, natural grace, and skill that will be unmistakably reflected in the way you walk, in the way you play, and in the way you work."*

So how does contrology benefit you?

If you look at one of the Pilates moves known as the 'Bridge with single leg'... you'll be asked to lie flat on the floor with your legs bent and the feet on the floor.

You'll then be asked to slowly extend one leg at a 45 degree angle. Once this is done, you'll need to curl and raise your hips upwards till it is in line with your shoulders and knees. You'll then lower and raise your hips a couple of times. After that, you'll repeat the move with the other leg.

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What this exercise does is it works your glutes, hamstring and abdominal muscles. You will be required to engage your core muscles to maintain good balance.

The slow controlled movement will mean that your muscles actually feel the tension and the entire body is working as a whole. You can't do this move in a bouncy, dynamic manner or you might end up needing a hip replacement.

Slow and steady is the way. While it may seem easy to execute, you'll be surprised to find that it's a lot more challenging than it sounds. Your muscles may quiver and there may be a mild burning sensation while your muscles are engaged. You'll feel relief when you relax.

The slow movement recruits more muscle fibers and also allows you to focus... which brings us to the next point.

## Focus/Concentration

You absolutely must concentrate and focus on the move when you're executing it. This is the mind-body connection that Pilates strives for. You'll need to clear your mind about the daily worries, activities, etc. and focus solely on the exercise.

This improves concentration. Many older people find themselves getting forgetful as they age. Pilates will help them improve brain function and memory. You'll also be required to visualize the movement in your mind before executing it. This improves your imagination too.

## Fluidity in Movement

Since you'll need to be fluid in your movements during your Pilates sessions, the muscles in your body will develop 'muscle memories'.

That means the fluid movements done during your sessions will translate to fluid movements during your day to day activities. You will be fluid when you walk, move, stand, etc. Your body has

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been conditioned to move efficiently. No more poor posture, abrupt movements that may cause sudden sprains or pulls, etc. that will cause you pain.

### Strong Core

Pilates focuses most of its movements on the body's midsection which it terms as the 'powerhouse'. Joseph Pilates believed that if the core was strong, most of the ailments in the body could be healed.

He is right. Many people who get started on Pilates struggle with the moves initially because the core is neither strong enough nor is it conditioned to work in that manner. In fact, even bodybuilders with bulging biceps struggle to execute some of the Pilates moves because core training is usually neglected by most people which explains why so many people experience strains and aches.

## Deep Breathing

In Pilates, you will be required to breathe in through your nose during the relaxing part of the exercise and exhale during the effortful part of the exercise. This will encourage deep breathing which leads to better health.

## Better Muscle Tone

While you will not become muscle bound with Pilates regardless of what age you practice it at, your body will become lean and lithe. Even seniors will notice that their muscle tone improves and they start feeling stronger.

As we age, our muscles get weaker and there is muscle atrophy. This is known as 'age-related sarcopenia'. While this may happen to people who are active too, Pilates will reduce the chances of it taking root in your body and even if you do get it, the effects will be mitigated.

The different Pilates moves will work your muscles and cause the body to retain muscle. You may even gain some muscle. You

won't become Hercules... but you will definitely be stronger with Pilates than without.

### Improved Balance and Flexibility

This is another benefit of Pilates. Like Joseph said, *"If your spine is inflexibly stiff at 30, you are old. If it is completely flexible at 60, you are young."*

With Pilates, your body will become more supple and see increased flexibility. Falling during old age is very common because seniors do not have the strength to correct a slip. Most younger people who slip a little will be able to quickly recruit the different muscles at once to prevent a fall.

Older people are usually weaker and have poorer balance. That's why they're considered as 'fall risks' in hospitals. Once again, Pilates comes to the rescue and gives them the strength and flexibility to stay balanced and risk-free.

Pilates really seems fantastic, doesn't it?

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A fun fact – many celebrities such as Madonna, Michelle Obama, Hugh Grant, John Cleese, Lady Gaga, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Anniston and Ian Mckellen are huge fans of Pilates and do it regularly.



## Chapter 5 - Steps Before Beginning Pilates

It may seem exciting to get started with Pilates. Beginning anything new is always an exciting phase. However, there are a few pointers that you need to remember before embarking on your Pilates program.

Remembering these points will not only keep you safe from injury but they'll also ensure that you stay on track and not quit on your Pilates journey after a couple of sessions.

Far too many people get off to a roaring start and after a couple of sessions, they stop doing it and go back to their old, sedentary lifestyle. You must guard against this at all costs.

### **Consult a Doctor**

This is very important. Since you're in your senior years, you may have health issues that may not agree with some of the Pilates

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moves. The best person to speak to will be your doctor and they'll advise you on what to do.

In some cases, your doctor may give you clearance but if you have painful knees or back pain, you should inform your Pilates instructor so that they will be able to monitor and guide your progress closely.

They'll also be able to recommend exercises that do not aggravate your pain. By doing these exercises, you'll strengthen your weaker muscles that are causing misalignments and imbalances. The pain may dissipate and disappear once you have achieved balance within your body.

## Find a Good Instructor

As mentioned in the earlier point, a good instructor will be immensely helpful when you're first getting started. Pilates is all about form and fluid execution. It's always best to have a trained eye watching you closely in order to ensure that techniques are executed properly.

## Be Patient

Initially, Pilates may be a struggle because your body is not used to the moves. You may not have the strength, grace or fluidity. It can be embarrassing to stumble around like a clumsy oaf.

Rest assured that most people start off this way. This is an art that takes time to master. You can't master Pilates in an hour or a day. Aim for 30 sessions. Once you reach the 30<sup>th</sup> session, you'll be amazed at how much progress you've made.

Many people make the mistake of quitting before the magic happens. After 7 sessions, they feel like things are not improving and they quit. They've not given the body enough time to adapt. In your senior years, it takes the body much longer to adapt.

So, be patient and enjoy the process. This is a slow journey and not a race. Slow and steady wins the race.

## Be Consistent

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What you do every day matters more than what you do once in a while. Your goal will be to set aside a fixed time every day or every other day to do Pilates workout. Aim for regular sessions. If you can do it outside where you get sunshine and fresh air, that would be fantastic.

### Choose the Right Centre

If you are choosing a Pilates centre, do check if their class schedule suits you. It would be a good idea to also ask if their instructors are able to cater to older people.

Some classes may be comprised mostly of younger people and the class may be too fast paced for you. You must find a centre that can help you progress at your own pace. Check if the instructors are qualified and if the centre looks clean and serene. You must feel comfortable there.

### Dress Comfortably & Eat Light

Pilates will require you to stretch and move your body. Make sure your clothes allow for free movement. Also, keep your meals light

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before your Pilates workout. You do not want to go for a Pilates class feeling stuffed with food.

### **Always Use a Mat**

Buy a Pilates mat and use it for all your Pilates workouts. Do not do Pilates on the floor or carpet and expect the carpet to have enough cushioning. It doesn't.

This is especially crucial to seniors who need more cushioning. Generally, seniors have less body fat on the palms, heels, etc. That makes certain Pilates positions more painful because of the lack of natural cushioning. A good, supportive Pilates mat will make a world of difference.

## Chapter 6 - What to Expect in a First Session

If it could be summarized in one word, that word would be “challenging”.

There’s just no getting around this fact. The majority of people struggle when they first start doing Pilates. This can be discouraging, especially when you’re in a class and you see others executing the moves with ease.

Rest assured that everyone started off slow. You only need to focus on improving yourself. With time, you too will reach a stage where you are fluid and executing the Pilates moves effortlessly and magnificently.

Your first session will also be confusing because you’re learning the moves for the first time. It may feel awkward and overwhelming.

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Many people feel like there's just too much to learn. The truth of the matter is that by your 5<sup>th</sup> session, you'll be much more familiar with the exercises and be able to transition from one move to the next without thinking too much. There is a learning curve but it is easily conquered with practice.

You may also experience mild body aches and muscular pains after a Pilates session. This is par for the course and is to be expected. Over time, as you get fitter and more capable, the Pilates sessions will leave you feeling refreshed and energized.

You will know that you're progressing when a Pilates workout leaves you feeling good and you look forward to each workout. Many seniors begin their day with a Pilates workout and claim that they feel much better the rest of the day after that.

The main point to note here is that you should take things slow. Do not expect your first session to be smooth sailing or expect overnight miracles. You have to take the slow approach. Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, life is hard.

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Do your best to enjoy your first session and learn as much as you can. Be attentive and mindful of the way your body moves and pay close attention to the execution of the exercises. That's the best way to learn.

*"If you're persistent, you'll get it. If you're consistent, you'll keep it."*



## Chapter 7 – 4 Fantastic Pilates Moves To Do

There are a few Pilates moves that are highly popular because of how effective they are. In fact, some of these moves are used in almost every Pilates workout because they're so versatile. By doing these exercises alone, you'd be benefitting your body greatly.

Let's look at 4 of the most popular and effective Pilates exercises. These are not the only moves you should do... there are many other moves that are excellent too. However, you should always take time to do the 4 moves listed below because they're so good for you.

### **The Hundred**

This is almost always used as a Pilates warm-up. The goal of 'The Hundred' is to flatten your midsection, work your core muscles, tone your arm muscles and boost your blood circulation.

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The move is pretty simple. You will lie on your back with your head and shoulder resting on the ground. You'll then slowly raise your legs to a 75 degree angle. Next, you will pump your arms up and down as if you are flapping your imaginary wings. You'll inhale for a count of 5 and exhale for a count of five. Do this till you reach 100 breaths.

## Spine Twist

This move is for targeting your upper back, delts, hamstrings, obliques and traps. This move will not only align and strengthen your spine and back muscles but it will increase your flexibility.

You will start in a seated position with your legs extended fully in front of you. If you are a beginner, you may wish to cross your legs to make the move easier.

You'll then check your posture and ensure that you're upright. Extend your arms outwards and sideways. Inhale deeply and when you exhale, gently suck in your midsection as if you're trying to make your belly button touch your spine.

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Once you have this abdominal vacuum, slowly rotate your body to the right until your left arm is parallel to your feet. Gently exhale and return to starting position. Do this for both sides and aim for 10 reps.

### Side Kick

This is a slightly challenging exercise that works your abdominals and gluteus maximus muscles.

Lie on your left side with your legs extended. Support your head with your hand. Next you will raise your right leg up as far as you can go and bring it back down. Aim for controlled movements. You don't want to be jerking and swinging your leg wildly.

Aim for 10 reps. In some Pilates classes, you may be asked to make small circular motions with the leg in order to further target the glutes. This can be tough but it's a really good workout.

## Leg Pull Front

This is another very popular Pilates exercise that recruits the triceps, glutes, pectorals and core muscles.

You will be on all fours as if you are about to crawl. Suck your midsection in and slowly extend one leg at a time till you are in a plank position. This is similar to the position you'd be in before doing a push-up.

Keep your feet close together and focus on maintaining good balance. Inhale deeply and as you exhale lift your left leg upwards.

You must be balanced and in control. Proceed through the move slowly and feel your abs working. Exhale and slowly bring the foot down. Do this for the other side too. Aim for five to ten reps.

These 4 moves will give you an idea of what Pilates feels like. You may wish to give them a try and see if you like it. Of course, be

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safe and proceed carefully. All the moves are relatively safe but caution is always a good thing.

## Chapter 8 - Avoiding Common Pitfalls

As with most things, there are always errors that we should steer clear of when doing Pilates. Knowing what these errors are and rectifying them is crucial to getting the best from your workouts.

This chapter will list some of the most common mistakes that many people make when doing Pilates. Be mindful of them and correct yourself. You absolutely must be focused during your Pilates workout. This is how Pilates helps you to achieve the mind-body connection.

### **Not breathing correctly**

A very common mistake. Beginners are so busy trying to execute the move correctly that they forget to match their inhaling and exhaling to their efforts. When you are easing up on a move, you inhale. When you are exerting to execute a move, you exhale. Just remember – exhale when you exert.

## **Not sucking in the abdominals**

Pilates focuses most of its attention on your core. You're always told to suck in your navel towards your spine. This not only tones your core but creates a vacuum in your midsection that will give you a flatter tummy.

You must engage your core properly throughout the workout. It's common for people to relax the midsection after the first rep. This is wrong. You engage your core throughout the workout.

## **Rushing through the moves**

People tend to believe that doing things faster equates to doing things better. While this may be true with other things, when it comes to Pilates, haste makes waste. You want to be slow and controlled. If you are rushing through the moves, your form will be compromised.

Another point to note is that Pilates becomes less challenging when you do the moves fast. Pilates uses isometric contraction to engage the muscles and make them work harder. By rushing

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through the moves, the tension that is so beneficial to the muscles will be sacrificed.

### **Shoulders raised / Head hanging – Not in alignment**

Your shoulders should always be flat and facing forward when doing moves that involve a plank position. Keeping your shoulders raised is a common mistake that must be avoided. Another mistake closely linked to this is hanging your head down instead of keeping it in alignment with your spine.

When doing moves such as the 'leg pull front' you will need to keep your shoulder down and facing forward and your head up. If you're tired and it's too difficult to keep your head up, do take a break. Never sacrifice form just to complete your workout.

It's better to stop your Pilates workout halfway if you're tired than to haphazardly do it just to say to say you completed it.



## **Lack of control / Too much momentum**

Control is everything. Joseph even called it 'contrology'. Don't be so focused on the external movements that you neglect the 'internal part' of the exercise. 90 percent of Pilates' focus is internal. So, keep your movements slow, steady... and most importantly, you **MUST** feel the movement when doing it.

You must feel the muscles working. Feel the fluidity, the resistance, the breathing – feel, feel, feel. This will keep you focused and your Pilates workouts will be fruitful.

Last but not least, do not fall into the trap of thinking that pain equals gain. Pilates can be challenging but you shouldn't force yourself and try to do too much too soon. You're trying to correct imbalances in your body, not create more.

There is no need to compete with your friends, other participants in the class, your spouse, etc. You just need to focus on yourself and make measurable progress in reasonable time. If you concern yourself with all the unnecessary distractions, you'll be

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taking away from your Pilates workouts and doing a disservice to yourself.

*"Slow progress is better than no progress."*

## Chapter 9 - Making Pilates Part of Your Lifestyle

“We first make our habits, then our habits make us.” – **John Dryden**

In order for you to truly benefit from Pilates, you must be consistent in your workouts. Fix a time each day when you'll do your Pilates session. Pilates is a gentle enough exercise for you to do daily.

In the event that you have muscular aches and pains from a previous session, you may take a break for a day or two. But you must get back on track. You **MUST** develop the habit of daily exercise.

Then and only then will you reap the full benefits of Pilates. It must become an integral part of your lifestyle and not an afterthought.

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Besides regular sessions, you must also remember to maintain good posture throughout the day. Initially, this may be difficult and will require you to constantly be aware of your posture. However, with time, you will automatically sit up straight and stand erect without hunching.

No exercise program is complete without some mention about your diet. Since you're in your senior years, it would be a good idea to consume more vegetables and fruit. These are rich in antioxidants and beneficial nutrients. Eat in moderation and avoid processed foods.

It would be a good idea to slowly try and lose all excess weight. A simple 500 calorie per day deficit will slowly get rid of all the excess fat. Besides your Pilates session, you may wish to go for a 20 to 30 minute walk to get some sunshine and cardio activity.

Do not stress yourself over small things. They often say that, "It's not what you eat that makes you sick. It's what's eating you." To a large extent this is true. While a poor diet is to be avoided at all costs, being stress-free is just as important.

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Pilates sessions are excellent for de-stressing because you will need to focus on the exercises and this will give you a mental break from your worries. Good health requires you to sweat the body and not the small stuff.

Last but not least, make sure you get enough rest and quality sleep. Pilates has been shown to promote better sleep since your muscles will be fatigued after the workouts and you will crave sleep.

## Advanced Chapter – Taking Things Up a Notch

If you've been doing Pilates for a while, you might like to make your workouts more challenging so that you can improve your strength and stamina. This is excellent.

There are a few things that you can do to make your workouts more challenging. Of course, the core principles of Pilates will still apply. You must have good form and the movements must be controlled. Exhale upon exertion and inhale upon relaxation.

Let's look at a couple of ways you can push yourself to improve.

### Use a Reformer

A Pilates reformer is a simple machine that was devised by Joseph Pilates to add resistance training to his workout. Most Pilates studios will have reformers for you to use. Or you could purchase one from Amazon.com

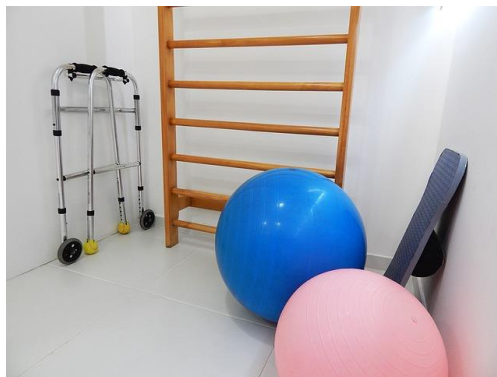
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By incorporating extra resistance training in your Pilates workout, you'll be able to work your muscles more and strengthen them further.

### Use Resistance Bands and Swiss Balls

Resistance bands can be used and are a cheaper alternative to the reformer. Advanced Pilates practitioners also use Swiss Balls to further engage their core muscles and open up new possibilities to the different Pilates moves.

The ball will require more balance and effort. Of course, it's important that you get proper instruction on using the bands and the Swiss Ball. Do not get creative or invent your own moves. It may result in injury.



## Conclusion

Congratulations on making it to the end of this book.

You may be surprised to know that the majority of people who start reading a book never complete it. If you've made it this far, you're definitely interested in Pilates and all the benefits it has to offer.

The best thing you can do, is to get clearance from your doctor and get started on a Pilates program. You could get a DVD or learn from Pilates videos on YouTube. Ideally you will learn best by joining a class that has qualified instructors to guide you properly.

Take your time and progress at your own pace. This is not a race. The more you do it, the better you will get at doing it. It's all a matter of time and practice.



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Since Pilates is a low-impact exercise, you can do it daily and feel refreshed and rejuvenated. What matters is that you get started today.

May you experience good health and youthful energy from making Pilates a part of your life.

“Every moment of our life can be the beginning of great things. “  
- **Joseph Pilates**