

# Strengthening From Within



Over the past 10 years, Pilates has enjoyed a huge surge in popularity largely due to Hollywood celebrities who have helped to bring it into the American mainstream. This tried and true method that was originally the “underground” exercise of choice for dancers and the rich and famous is actually almost 100 years in existence. After years of high-impact, make-‘em-sweat, feel-it-burn workouts, the trend is now heading towards softer, safer and more sensible approach to health and wellness. As the saying goes, everything old eventually becomes new again. Pilates has truly come of age.

By Kathleen Keller

With an emphasis on core conditioning, breath and body awareness, Pilates is a highly effective way to strengthen, stretch and balance your body without stressing your joints or building bulk. Performed on specialized equipment or just on a mat, Pilates is a fitness system for a lifetime. The perfect complement to any sport, cardiovascular or weight training program, living a healthy life in general or rehabilitating an injury, Pilates will leave you feeling tall and energized, looking toned and have you moving with greater ease. The Pilates program is one of the safest and most effective workouts you will ever find. There is no other system available that can give you such a challenging workout yet be so gentle at the same time.

We owe an enormous and eternal debt of gratitude to the German-born founder of Pilates, Joseph H. Pilates. Not only was he the inventor of the original equipment and the exercises, he was truly a movement pioneer and an individual who was way ahead of his time. Joseph called his original method “Contrology”. It was only after his death in 1967 that his method started becoming known as Pilates. Today, his original principles still very much form the cornerstone of his work. Every movement taught threads back into his original methodology. If it doesn’t, then it’s just “making some shapes” and it isn’t true Pilates.

## The 6 Original Principles of CONTROLOGY

- **BREATHING** German-born Joe used to simply say “In vit da good air, und out vit da bad! He believed that breathing fully helped to cleanse the body of toxins. Although he did not have the scientific data to back it up, he also believed that breath could truly propel every movement. Later on, you will read and explore how today this particular principle has evolved with a much more scientific approach. The breath CAN actually fuel the movement on a physiological level.

- **CENTERING**, When taking a Pilates lesson, you might hear your teacher say that you have no arms and no legs. You are a torso with periphery that emanates outward from your center. Every movement we perform is initiated from the torso or center of the body. This includes the abdominals, back, pelvis and buttocks. Moving from your center develops a strong core and enables the rest of the body to function more efficiently in all your activities.

- **PRECISE MOVEMENT** Pilates is very much about the retraining of poor postural habits and optimizing every movement. Retraining happens on a very deep neurological level, over time and with consistent effort. It only happens when we perform an exercise in a correct and precise manner. We aim to execute 3 to 8 perfect repetitions of an exercise not 15 or 20 hap hazard ones. The goal is to reinforce positive movement patterns with proper form for safe, effective results.

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- **FLUID MOVEMENT.** We are fluid beings – in daily life we function in a rhythm from one movement to the next, we are seamless. Once you are working at a strong level in Pilates, the exercises become a smooth blend of co-ordination and balance. What used to be eight repetitions of an exercise soon becomes one seamless exercise. We flow through movements that are dynamic, systematic and anatomically based. This increases your ability to integrate correct movement patterns more effortlessly in your day to day life.

- **CONTROLLED MOVEMENT.** This principle is linked closely with Precision. Every movement has a purpose; it is not about fancy choreography – it’s about bettering your day to day functional movement pattern. We do not do an exercise simply for the sake of an exercise. Each movement we choose is performed in a controlled manner with a purpose and a goal behind it.

MERMAIDS ON THE REFORMER.



- **MENTAL CONCENTRATION** “It is the mind which builds the body.” said Joseph Pilates. Pilates helps to improve the mind/body connection. Unlike a conventional gym workout, you must be present and in tune with your body to reap the benefits. There is too much going on in a session for you to be thinking about your plans that evening. Conscious control of movement enhances body awareness. Better body awareness increases the effectiveness of the exercise. Many people come to a very meditative state while doing Pilates and therefore, grow mentally and spiritually over time through this type of exercise.

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