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## Toning The Spirit

By Katie Moore

Yogalates, say its aficionados, is a workout that tones both your physical and spiritual well-being. It's also the perfect fusion of yoga and Pilates and it's a combination that makes lots of sense.

Yoga, an energy-based spiritual practice, relies on a fluid series of movements with a constant focus on breathing to attain bodily and mental control and develop flexibility and strength.

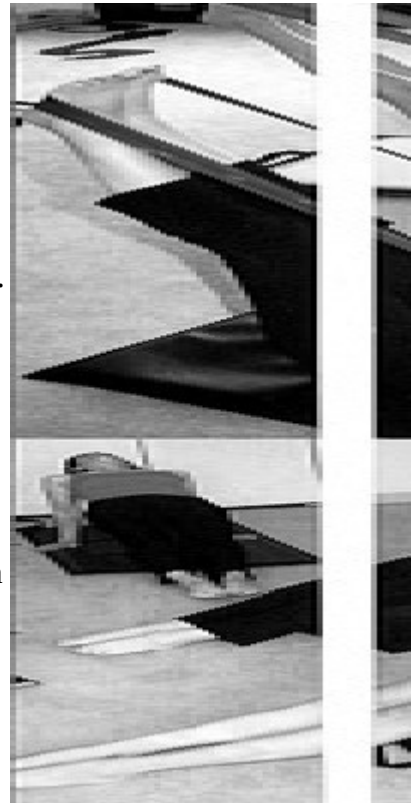
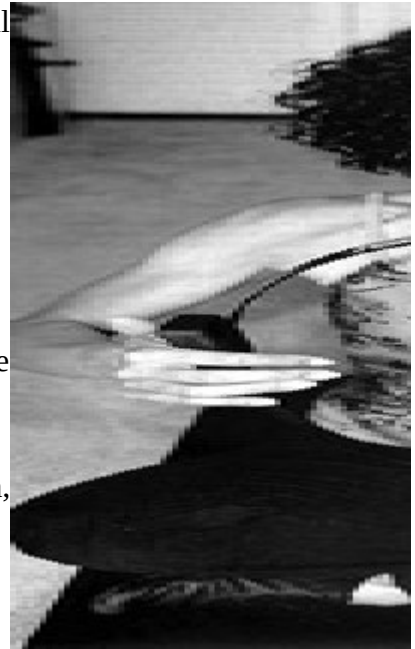
Pilates was developed in the 1920s to help overcome injuries and reduce core weaknesses. Its founder, Joseph Pilates, studied yoga and incorporated some of its principles into his method. The exercises rely on concentrated movements that use the abdominals to develop strength, continually activating those muscles with precise breathing techniques.

Yogalates is the perfect mix for beginners who lack the core strength to practice yoga - particularly vigorous power yoga - without the risk of injury, yet who still seek the balanced flexibility yoga delivers.

I decided to give this new trend a try at Daniela Moretti's studio (1115 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal QC; 514-285-4884; [www.pilates-montreal.com](http://www.pilates-montreal.com)) in downtown Montreal, where she offers private, semi-private and group classes. My trim and healthy classmates all were almost twice my age, though they looked no more than 10 years older. Could Yogalates also hold the secret to staying young? I liked it already.

### BELLY UP

The hour-long class started with a few breathing exercises that focused on squeezing your belly button into your spine. Mine just didn't want to go there. My classmates groaned as we lifted and lowered our legs while balancing on our buttocks with our stomachs tightened. We began a series of movements and ended up in push-up position. We used the Thera-Bands to work on our arms. We really worked hard on our abdominals, but all the while we focused on our breathing and took breaks from the arduous movements with relaxing stretches that felt really good.



Each Yogalates studio mixes the amounts of yoga and Pilates differently. The Solomon Method was developed 10 years ago by Louise Solomon, whose personal experience with a yoga-induced back injury led her to combine the two techniques. This total body workout aims to improve flexibility and strength without building bulk. Thera-Bands (which look like exercise elastics used for years in aerobics-toning classes) replace the typical Pilates machines for resistance training. Yogalates also fuses the Pilates and yoga breathing systems as a way of trimming that waist, flattening that belly and enhancing stamina while you relax. Besides general tone and fitness, testimonials suggest that Yogalates may help with osteoporosis, arthritis and some bad backs. It's often recommended for post-natal women, because of its focus on strengthening the pelvis, pelvic floor and abdominal muscles.

Unlucky for me, Yogalates, much like yoga and Pilates, is one of those sports where the more you do it and the better you are at the movements, the less it hurts. But I left there feeling very relaxed and my muscles didn't get sore until a few hours later, after I'd woken up from the nap I fell into immediately after arriving home.

Contact your local Y, gym, yoga or Pilates studio to find out about Yogalates courses in your area. Studios often develop their own versions of the workout, so either find one that offers the Solomon Method or ask questions to ensure you'll get what you're looking for. Maybe Yogalates is the exercise regimen to end all regimens. Dusty treadmills, Stairmasters and five-pound weights may soon sit lonely and unloved in empty workout rooms, while across the hall swarms of terribly relaxed and healthy individuals will work on being even more relaxed while trimming their thighs.