

The Power of Pilates

By Daniela Moretti

We all look to exercise for different reasons. I turned to Pilates to help me fight a degenerating spine and overcome chronic back pain that was crippling my life. In my early thirties, I was told I had the spine of a 65 year old – medical professionals made it clear I should live within the limitations that my body dictated. But I had a plan to fulfill a lifelong dream.

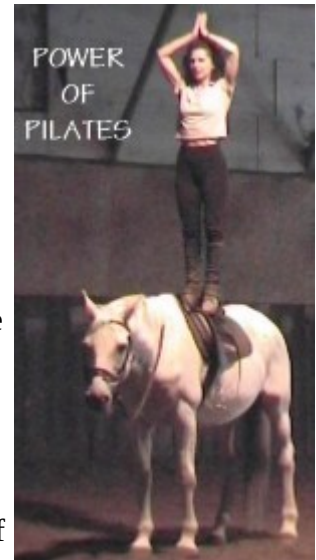
What was causing my problems? Everything! Take a stressed-out mind in a fatigued body. Add shallow breathing, poor posture and extreme muscle fatigue and the package is complete – the perfect environment for chronic pain and spinal column degeneration. Isn't stress a joy? And to release my stress, I continuously pushed myself harder.

From the age of twelve, my dream was to ride horses and learn the discipline of dressage. Life got busy, the dream stayed on the shelf and the back pains that started at age 21 just kept getting worse. Riding is an impact sport and a degenerating spine can not tolerate any form of impact, so my riding experience became a never-ending battle of pain, discomfort and frustration. Even with Pilates, it took years of discipline and understanding to rebuild my core strength and learn to release the emotional tension that was creating the problems. My spine is still and will always be fragile and vulnerable, but the muscles around it are now toned and protect the bone structure. I now ride on a regular basis, pain-free.

What has Pilates done for me? Everything! I have learned to take control of my own well-being. To take the time to listen to my body's limits. To use controlled breathing to reduce anxiety. To think about my posture every minute of the day. This is not as difficult as it may sound. The body wants to stand up straight: weak muscles and bad habits create poor posture. I have come to understand and appreciate the importance of stretching as a part of a regular exercise program. It is hard to stretch correctly when your mind is racing in a thousand different directions. Having personally experienced its benefits, teaching the Pilates Method was the next logical step.

In our fast-paced society, fitness moves in fads and trends. I was saddened to see an article titled, Is the Pilates craze over? Pilates is a method, a style, an anatomically correct way of moving the body in a preventative fashion. It should be a part of every fitness program. There is no quick fix, no fast way to improve our bodies: it takes commitment and work to see real results, but you will see great results that will last a lifetime!

Over ninety years ago, Joseph Pilates predicted that overdoing exercise would do more harm than good. His exact words were, "This infraction creates muscle fatigue-poison." He called his method Contrology, because it was designed to teach his students to master their minds in order to gain control of their bodies.



With the effect of time, gravity and heavy training, the body has a tendency to compress and stiffen: Pilates can help reverse this process. Physical therapists find that Pilates works well in repairing soft-tissue damage, and that the precision of the movements improves muscle memory for all kinds of sports, actually helping to prevent injuries, promote balance and improve coordination. This method of working out is rapidly growing in popularity, attracting athletes, performers, and people of all ages and fitness levels.

In recent years, many new schools of Pilates have opened, teaching various forms of Pilates. What do all these methods have in common? They share the fundamental and most profound aspect of the Joseph Pilates Method: original core strength as a means of stabilization. Most have the same basic movements integrated into a program in various ways. Pilates can be taught for strength work or for relaxation. Where do the various methods of Pilates differ? This depends on the emphasis of the innovative inventor. A good program combines strength and stretch aspects equally. As our knowledge about aging increases, Pilates will continue to take on new forms, as no one has all the answers to chronic pain, staying fit or excelling in athletics. The school you follow is an individual choice and should be based on your individual body type. As a rule, anything that hurts should be avoided, as should too many repetitions of the same exercise. Form and body position are the essence of every exercise.

My goal is to give you the tools to stop and listen without going against your true nature. I am over 40 – I “felt the burn” for most of my life; I no longer want the burn and my body has never been better. What I do want is to be toned, feel good, walk gracefully, and to have the energy to pursue activities I did not have time or money for when I was younger. I want to pursue these activities without hurting myself. I want a mind set that is more positive than negative, which can address life with consistency and steadiness. Simplicity is the key! If we set realistic goals, our bodies will change as we age – how much will be a personal choice. Embrace the change and keep a healthy mental attitude.

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