

body balance

So you're finally seeing some value in being healthy in mind, as well as body. If strength, balance, tone and flexibility is what you want, then Pilates is what you need. By personal trainer **Donna Jones**.

While it's been around for about 70 years, Pilates has only recently become popular. This is largely due to the stars who have embraced it, such as Madonna, Sharon Stone and Julia Roberts. But the real appeal of Pilates is also due to more sensible reasons. As instructor and teacher Sally Anderson says: "People are seeing how it's functionally able to change and bring back balance in their body." As the director of Pilates International, which she runs from her inner-city studio in Sydney, Anderson literally stumbled upon Pilates after a severe ankle injury in the late 1980s. After being sent to master Pilates teacher Rael Isacowitz for rehabilitation, Anderson's ankle healed in record time and no longer needed surgery. She was also hooked.

what is pilates?

As Anderson found, Pilates is a major rehabilitation method, especially for those with back pain resulting from poor posture. It's used as a conditioning method to develop strength and flexibility. It also tones and can also be a gentle cardio workout.

Pilates is based on developing strength in the body's core stabilising muscles. "It combines aspects of Eastern and Western bodywork philosophies, focusing on integrating the mind and the breath," says Anderson.

Pilates uses specialised equipment and matwork exercises to execute a series of specially designed movements. As Anderson says, the main objective "is to restore musculoskeletal balance around a strong centre — the abdominals, pelvis and back".

humble beginnings

Born in Germany in 1880, Joseph Pilates had a difficult youth, suffering from asthma, ticks, and rheumatic fever. To combat the effects of these ailments, he studied and learned body building, diving, skiing, and gymnastics.

When World War I broke out, Pilates was interned with other Germans and trained other internees in his own physical fitness exercises. Pilates is widely credited with the fact that none of his trainees died during the influenza epidemic that killed thousands in England that year.

In 1926, Pilates emigrated to the US, and on the way there met his future wife Clara on the boat. Together, they established a studio in New York City to teach his fitness program.

Pilates attracted the attention of many of the major innovators of modern dance in New York, and as his work and reputation grew, so did the formulation of Pilates.

how do I start

Most gyms now offer Pilates matwork classes. A benefit of Pilates matwork is that it's a cheaper option for individual or small group sessions. "However," warns Anderson, "the classes in a lot of gyms are with instructors who have only done a three-day course, and they are often in really large numbers, which means that you don't get the supervision necessary."

Anderson advises you to do your homework and check up on instructors' qualifications. Avoid large classes if you are a beginner, "And if an instructor can't tell you why you're doing a particular exercise, they're probably not fully trained," Anderson warns.

To get you started, Anderson has put together this routine (on the opposite page) for you to do at home.

Start with three to five repetitions and build up to 10 reps.

"With each repetition, aim for the best possible movement," says Anderson. Repetitions are kept restricted in order to prevent you from forming any bad patterns or fatigue movements."

>> Sally Anderson is working out here on one of the many specialised pieces of equipment used in Pilates. The equipment varies from fit balls to ladder barrels and wobble boards. One of the most common and well-known pieces of equipment is the reformer, which uses springs to create varying resistance. Using such equipment is great for beginners or for people with special needs, as it is non-weight bearing.

pilates principles

The Pilates method relies on creating and strengthening your body's core muscles to control movement.

Pilates requires correct recruitment of the appropriate muscles and progression from basic through to more challenging work.

All movements must be started by pulling in (referred to as scooping) deeply with the abdominals to stabilise the body and control the movement.

Keep your belly button pulled in towards your spine at all times to access the deep abdominals (transverse abdominus).

At all times keep your shoulders drawing down by engaging the stabilising muscles under your arms (latissimus dorsi).

Developing and executing correct technique will support the spine, as well as strengthen your abdomen and improve your posture.

is pilates for you

Do you sit at a computer for long periods of time?

Do you want to increase your flexibility?

Do you have an old injury that still gives you pain?

Do you want flatter and more toned stomach?

Do you need a change from traditional forms of strength training, such as weights?

Do you currently suffer from back pain?

Do you think your posture could be improved?

Do you want to give your mind and spirit a workout, as well as your body?

Do you feel like you need a change to your current exercise routine?

If you answered mostly yes Pilates is made with people like you in mind.

If you answered mostly no the benefits of Pilates may still impress you. Give it a go.



the starting pose

Anderson says it takes some time and practice to do the full series of Pilates moves (known as the hundreds) correctly. But for absolute beginners, these are the more basic, easy to do moves used to prepare you for the full sequence.

1 Reach your arms up to the sky, above the shoulders, with your shoulders square and wide. Hold your knees above your hips and feet in line with your knees. Keep the abdominals pulled in and controlled.

2 Exhale and start pulling the abdominals in. Press your arms beside your hips as your legs extend. Don't let your stomach pop out.

3 Inhale as you return to the start position, keeping your abdominals pulled in and shoulders down.

Note: If you feel too much pressure on your lower back, bend your legs. Make sure you start the movement from the abdominals and don't lift up from the neck first.



2a



2b

the rollover

1 Hold legs straight up, with arms by your side.

2 Exhale and use your abdominals (pulled in) to take your legs over your head.

3 Holding your legs straight and just off the floor, inhale and open your legs to the width of your shoulders and flex your feet.

4 Exhale as you roll down through the spine, using your abdominals to control the movement.

5 Inhale as you bring your legs back together.

the dart

1 Lie on your stomach, with your arms by your sides and palms up.

2 Exhale as you pull your abdomen up to your spine (without pushing so far as to put a curve in your spine).

3 Inhale and lift your shoulders and arms up off the floor. Keep your neck long and in line with your upper back and arms, and continue to pull your upper torso off the floor.

4 Exhale, holding and strengthening the position, and focus on drawing your abdominals in deeper.

5 Inhale, slowly lower your torso, keeping the movement controlled by your abdominal muscles.

recommended Pilates studios

new south wales
Pilates International
(02) 9699 5509

victoria
Paramount Pilates
(03) 9326 0202

queensland
Pilates Plus
(07) 5577 3155

western australia
Prescriptive Fitness
(08) 9284 7115

All other locations can contact Pilates International on (02) 9699 5509 for recommended studios in their area. Recommended and affiliate studios and instructors are also available in Canberra, Adelaide and some regional areas.



3a



3b

