

Trending NOW?

In the seventh annual ACSM fitness survey, which polls industry professionals for their views on exercise trends for the coming year, pilates – previously a regular entry on the list – failed to make the top 20 for a third consecutive year. So is the exercise technique falling out of favour, and if so, why? Kate Cracknell asks the experts

GLENN WITHERS
Founding director,
APPI Health Group



It's a shame that pilates appears to be losing its steam in the ACSM list of fitness trends – but actually, pilates is not a fitness trend. I feel the explosion of pilates in gyms may have led it to be portrayed as such, with a slight watering-down of the technique, but in fact it's a solid, consistent form of exercise that's still experiencing great growth around the

world. Certainly in our centres, overall participation rates continue to increase. I would question the growth of pilates in gyms though, and certainly don't believe its future rests solely in fitness-specific environments. Pilates is very multi-faceted – it's equally suitable for health centres, medical centres, rehab centres, old age facilities etc – so it's less reliant on being included in fitness trend listings. Having said all that, I do feel the pilates industry needs to wake up and ensure it's continuing to be innovative and inclusive. For example, APPI is launching a new programme this year – Performance

Pilates – which uses pilates as a performance booster targeted at specific sports and populations, using functional movements to create a new workout around pilates moves. This approach will energise the sector and help redefine what pilates can be used for. I also believe the fitness industry needs to do more to prove its effectiveness – something those in the pilates sector are well-placed to do. If we can get some great studies proving what a difference pilates can make in different areas, gyms may yet see the technique back on the list of hot trends for the future.

Pilates: Less a trend, more a lifelong exercise choice



KEN FITZMAURICE
Master trainer,
TenPilates



I believe one of the reasons pilates isn't listed among the ACSM trends has as much to do with the survey itself as with the relevance of pilates today. The survey was completed by 3,346 health and fitness professionals worldwide: not necessarily an accurate view of what the fitness industry is doing, considering there are over 250,000 fitness trainers in the US alone. For many respondents, pilates may simply not be part of their skillset or frame of reference. That said, it's always good to see how industry professionals view the sector, and it's important for pilates instructors to keep pushing the name and benefits of this form of training to the forefront.

In addition, while pilates itself may not be listed as one of the top trends, many of the trends that do make it onto the top 10 – strength training, bodyweight training, fitness for older adults, functional training and core training – are constituent elements of pilates. Trends, by definition, come and go; at TenPilates, we're more interested in the underlying fundamentals that have ongoing benefit for individuals in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the whole shape of the fitness industry is changing, and these changes are affecting the ability of pilates to become part of the mainstream. The sector is becoming polarised in terms of facilities, specialisation and price, with



Pilates requires precision, and may be more suited to specialist training facilities

more people joining high-end, boutique/specialist or budget clubs. Everything in the middle will die away or downsize rapidly – we're seeing this already. The investment in both people and equipment that has enabled gyms to offer pilates is not there any more: those doing pilates in a mainstream gym will find it's usually mat rather than reformer, and taught by a non-specialist instructor. Pilates requires precision in the way it's taught and practised, and it may well be that its delivery therefore moves into more specialist studios going forward. In the end, any discipline is only as good as the results and experience it provides to its users: if you don't create an experience that will keep people coming back, they won't get results and will move on to the next thing.

CHRIS ONSLOW
MD,
Mbodies Training Academy



Pilates has matured and become established, with other new trends coming to the fore and grabbing the attention. The new 'wellness' trend, for example, actually provides many pilates therapists with high client retention and rich pickings once they've invested in the right training and infrastructure. However, 'wellness' rather than 'pilates' is the current buzz-term, and successful pilates teachers are therefore using their expertise to work within this new trend, as well as other niche markets. In the noughties, the masses were crammed into the rapidly renamed legs, bums and tums classes, now called pilates matwork. This sort of fitness pilates offered little for the 'sweaters', who moved on to group cycling, circuits, kettlebells and so on

to fulfil their cardio urges. Meanwhile, the typical 25- to 40-year-old 'no sweat' brigade found no greater benefits from matwork pilates than the generations before gained from callanetics or legs, bums and tums; some stayed with pilates, but many moved on as new trends came along. Wellness pilates, on the other hand, is taught by better qualified therapists and addresses conditions such as ante natal exercise, osteoporosis, incontinence and pelvic disorders, rehab from injury, lower back pain, breast cancer rehab, neuromuscular conditions, menopause and so on. Baby Boomers and affluent seniors seeking active lifestyles into their 80s and 90s – despite the barriers of medical conditions – often come to pilates, recognising it meets their needs. The challenge for the sector is to provide new tools for the 75 per cent of pilates teachers who are qualified to teach matwork only, helping them adapt into the new trend markets rather than relying on pilates itself as the trend.

KEN ENDELMAN
Founder & CEO,
Balanced Body



From a club's perspective, I honestly wouldn't be too alarmed about the ACSM ranking. And I don't say that blindly – I say that because these last two years, when pilates has fallen off the ACSM list, have been the most successful in Balanced Body's 35-year history. That means a lot of our customers' pilates offerings are also flourishing. There may be a decrease in 'newbies' trying pilates for the first time, and of course there are those who always seem to move on to the latest exercise trend. However, pilates definitely has a rock-solid foundation with a dedicated following. What you see now is pilates programming making the transition between 'hot and new' to 'here to stay'. That being said, this transition isn't automatic for any club, and it isn't easy money. The clubs that are expanding or launching successful pilates programming must continue to do the legwork to keep it strong: aggressively marketing it to their members, keeping internal staff up to speed so they can answer any questions, creating innovative group programming (eg speciality classes for members with similar demographics, such as pilates for golfers), and making sure instructors keep up on their continuing education so programming stays fresh and relevant to members. If clubs do that, pilates will do what it's always done: provide a key source of non-dues revenue. Clubs that don't will most likely fail.

LINDSAY G MERRITHEW
 President & CEO,
 Merrithew Health & Fitness



It's disappointing that pilates has been left off the 2013 ACSM Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends, particularly as the survey results are widely discussed and debated among fitness professionals. However, while commentary around the survey results suggests that pilates has run its useful course, this is far from the reality we have been experiencing: enrolment on our STOTT PILATES teacher education courses and workshops, which I consider to be an appropriate barometer for the modality, continues to grow year-on-year, worldwide.

What is most gratifying about the survey results is that pilates delivers on at least eight of the top 10 identified trends: pilates has endless applications (encompassing strength, bodyweight training, core training and functional fitness trends listed by the ACSM), numerous means of delivery (including two further ACSM trends: personal and group personal training), and appeals to diverse populations, like older adults. The industry would be wrong if it didn't recognise this, and acknowledge that pilates is far more than a passing fad.

What can be done differently to ensure pilates resurfaces as a trend within the ACSM survey will most likely come down to the way pilates, or other forms of mindful movement, are marketed to the diverse set of survey participants (commercial, clinical, community and corporate). These participants embrace the importance of health and wellbeing, but may still view the pilates modality as sitting within a narrowly defined set of parameters.



Enrolment on STOTT PILATES courses is growing year-on-year

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“WHAT IS MOST GRATIFYING ABOUT THE ACSM SURVEY RESULTS IS THAT PILATES DELIVERS ON AT LEAST EIGHT OF THE TOP 10 TRENDS”

DAVID ELLIOTT
 MD,
 Pilates-Mad



The majority of the trends in the ACSM list are broader than specific activities such as pilates: pilates could be seen to fall within 10 or more of the top 20 trends identified.

I feel equipment-based pilates in particular is very rewarding, and in

keeping with many of the ACSM trends. However, while there are thousands of studios offering equipment-based pilates in the US, this hasn't taken off to the same extent in the UK – due, I believe, to the high cost of training and equipment, and a lack of co-operation between training providers that means progressing to specialist courses is time-consuming and expensive. This must be addressed, and is something we're looking at through new equipment ranges and training at the Mbodies Training Academy.

The pilates sector also needs to keep its offering fresh, with innovations in equipment and programming to keep members engaged. And it needs to make it more financially and logistically viable for operators to continue to deliver a high quality pilates offering – developing equipment that could be used without the need for a bespoke studio, for example, and even used for other types of classes.

All that said, based on our sales of equipment and accessories, pilates in no way seems to be losing popularity. ●