

# Being Active for Life



MERRITHEW  
HEALTH & FITNESS

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**O**ften noted as a form of exercise for the highly skilled, rich or famous, pilates is now being embraced by the medical and rehab communities who are applauding the wide-reaching virtues of this highly targeted approach.

The American Council on Exercise reports that there has been an increase in specialized fitness programming for older adults over the past few years. A well-balanced fitness program offers many benefits for seniors because it conditions muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones to help fight osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, keeps the body more limber, stabilizes joints, and lowers the risk of everyday injury. Moreover, physical activity helps enhance overall quality of life, increase life expectancy, and helps older adults stay independent.

“Pilates is a gentle restorative exercise regimen perfectly suited for most people as they recover and work to rebuild their bodies,” explains Moira Merrithew, Executive Director of Education for STOTT PILATES®, a premier Merrithew Health & Fitness brand.

In his time, Joseph Pilates was considered by many to be a master of rehabilitation. His approach focused on core strength, precision and control of movement. Combine that with current exercise science and you’ve got a recipe for success.

“Pilates works on developing a balance between strength and mobility through individual and adjacent joints. It serves to increase core stability and peripheral mobility, ensuring proper muscle firing patterns are maintained,” explains Moira. “Through specifically chosen exercises, pilates can increase neuromuscular awareness and improve balance and coordination. For the practitioner, it allows focus to be placed on individual body parts as well as their integration into the body as a whole.”

## The Benefits of Pilates

Pilates helps bring awareness to optimal posture and aligning the skeleton to achieve this. It focuses on working in and towards an ideal neutral alignment, while achieving a functional range of motion at all the joints. It increases an individual’s ability to perform active daily living tasks safely and effectively through a variety of programming options.

The emphasis on breathing allows exercisers to focus their minds on what their bodies are doing. Pilates is all about using breath more effectively so we can increase awareness and focus in our every day

lives. So the ultimate mind-body connection is truly effective – benefiting most people who participate at any age or life stage.

STOTT PILATES® is a contemporary approach to the original exercise method pioneered by the late Joseph Pilates. Moira Merrithew, along with President & CEO of The Merrithew Health & Fitness Group, Lindsay G. Merrithew, and a team of physical therapists, sports medicine and fitness professionals, have spent more than a decade refining the method of exercise and equipment making it more accessible for everyone. This has resulted in the inclusion of modern principles of exercise science and spinal rehabilitation, making it one of the safest and most effective methods available.

STOTT PILATES has created “Specialty Tracks” to educate instructors on working with post-rehab patients, athletes, the active-aging population, golfers and pre/postnatal women. Reaching out to new markets can also spur innovation. In creating programming specific to rehab and post-rehab clients, Merrithew has developed Reformers that are higher off the ground (for easier mounts and dismounts) and that allow for a greater range of functional movement.

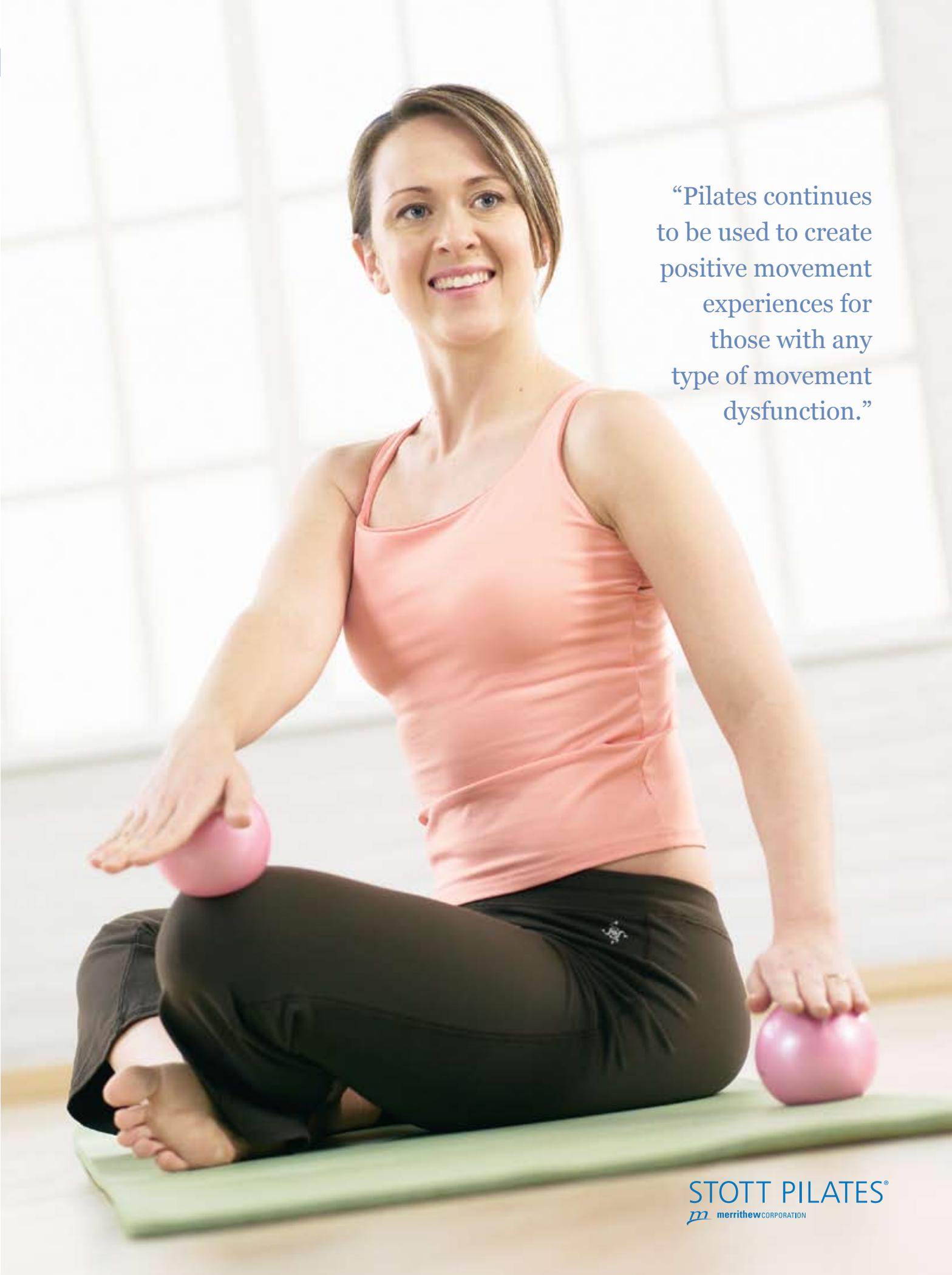
## Reaching the Rehab Community

Pilates continues to be used to create positive movement experiences for those with any type of movement dysfunction. Leading pilates authorities are assisting this currently by developing specialized programming for particular populations. Today there is a definite partnership between pilates experts and rehabilitation specialists and by working together, we can bridge the gap between rehab and fitness and be able to reach an immense number of individuals who otherwise would not realize their movement potential.

Melanie Byford-Young is a Rehab Master Instructor Trainer for STOTT PILATES’ proprietary Rehabilitation Program. She has a Bachelor of Health Science in Physical Therapy and has worked as a Physiotherapist for eight years. Byford-Young maintains that the rehab community has definitely opened their arms to the notion of incorporating the principles of pilates into rehab for older adults. “Acceptance of pilates from rehab professionals varies with the education and exposure of clinicians to pilates,” she states.

“The Basic Principles of STOTT PILATES are consistent with the Basic Principles of Rehabilitation. We work with the premise that pilates and rehabilitation needs to address the body as a whole, not just a collection of individual parts. Successful aging is the ability to function at the level an individual wishes – requires mobility of joints as well as strength of the muscular system to propel us. The integrity of our shoulders, hips, knees and spine are all interconnected and must all be addressed when managing or preventing aches, pains and degeneration.”

The rehab and medical communities are embracing pilates for many reasons based on this theory. Pilates is gentle on the joints, focuses on suppleness and strength and can be used to address and rehabilitate specific issues with the active aging. Pilates can also >>

A woman with brown hair, wearing a peach-colored tank top and black leggings, is sitting on a green mat. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. She has two pink exercise balls, one in her right hand and one on the floor to her left. The background is a bright, windowed area.

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“STOTT PILATES equipment is designed to enable each client to have as much support or challenge that they require”

be practiced for preventative measures and to stay in shape after physical therapy. It can be adapted to meet the needs and goals of individuals, and thus can be a very safe way to exercise and move the body. Pilates is both a mental and physical challenge and can be done for a lifetime. “For the clinician,” adds Byford-Young. “Pilates is a template for assessing clients and for giving exercises and homework.”

### Pilates Programming and Equipment

Although ‘core training’ may be a bit of a catch phrase in the fitness industry, the true definition of the term is widely acknowledged in medical and rehabilitation communities as the basis for reconditioning the support musculature of the body. Pilates as a method of exercise focuses on working the muscles from the inside out rather than the outside in. In this way, the deepest layers of muscles in the torso, transversus abdominis, lumbar multifidi and pelvic floor to name a few, are trained to protect the lower back while allowing the body to perform movements with more ease and fluidity. This is achieved by performing controlled movements, and by paying special attention to the mind-body connection.

“Pilates helps people overcome aches and pains and therefore can enjoy every day activities,” adds Laureen Dubeau, Communications Director, Education and Master Instructor Trainer for STOTT PILATES®, who has worked with a 69-year-old client who has suffered from lower back pain on and off for most of her life. “She saw a variety of doctors, therapists and chiropractors for a number of years, but after short-term relief, the pain would always return. Although she never liked to exercise, she’s been practicing pilates for approximately six years. She was amazed recently when I asked her about her back. ‘You know,’ she replied slightly astonished, ‘I haven’t had a sore back in years!’” This story is not uncommon.

Pilates exercises modified to be done in chairs are becoming more common and are specifically designed for those who may not be able to lay down on a mat or other pilates equipment. Regardless of the reason for someone’s mobility challenges, there are hundreds of exercises that can be advantageous from a seated position. In many cases, participants will notice changes right away in the way they move.

In chair-based pilates, movements are performed on their own or with the assistance of resistance bands or small weights. Small props can help participants and instructors simulate many of the exercises normally done on traditional pilates equipment with springs. The

idea is to encourage ideal posture that works the all-important core muscles, and then work towards strengthening and lengthening the rest of the body as necessary.

Rehab programming can also involve larger mat-based classes, but is most effective when equipment is incorporated into private and smaller groups. With over 300 exercises to choose from in the essential work with STOTT PILATES, the client or class challenge their deep stabilizers to maintain proper positioning while strengthening the core and periphery, using Matwork and equipment based exercises. They can then progress to more co-coordinated and powerful movements.

With proper instruction and programming, the pilates instructor can ensure that their class/clientele are achieving the best result from their workout. Proper positioning, cueing, postural awareness and programming are all part of the education component of STOTT PILATES education.

The variety of exercises available as well as the ability to modify these movement patterns allows professionals to target a specific muscle or muscle group. By changing the angle or strength of resistance, injuries can be precisely addressed. For example, the side arm work sitting on the Reformer using a very light spring tension can help access the deep stabilizing muscles of the shoulder girdle including the rotator cuff. Performing this series of exercises not only targets individual muscles, but takes into account the positioning and stabilization of the body as a whole and how this plays in to creating healthy movement patterns right away.

Pilates equipment lends itself well to the rehabilitation process because of its ability to support body weight, its adjustability, and ability to help guide movements in the initial stages of recovery. Specially designed pilates equipment can help facilitate these adaptations. Knees, hips, shoulders and particularly the spine can be rehabilitated effectively on the Reformer – the most popular apparatus – as well as the Stability Chair™ and Cadillac Trapeze Table. There are also innovative pilates machines that are higher off the ground to accommodate older exercisers.

While pilates equipment is outstanding in its ability to aid in the rehabilitation process, the machines on their own cannot achieve this goal. It is necessary to complement the equipment with sound principles of stabilization, intelligent exercise and modification choices and an understanding of how all of these can be accessed using the unique features of the apparatus. None of these are possible without a thorough understanding of the pilates principles and their implementation in a rehabilitative setting.

“STOTT PILATES equipment is designed to enable each client to have as much support or challenge that they require,” says Byford-Young. “Clients should ask instructors and therapists what their training is, and ensure that their instructor is certified by a recognized organization. The pilates equipment should be high-quality and have complementary programming to suit every users needs.”

### Exercise for a Lifetime

In any form and at any level, even the most rudimentary, pilates can be a starting point, an end point or a maintenance tool for the active aging. Virtually anyone can realize improvements to an array of movement dysfunctions including neurological disorders, cardiopulmonary restrictions, orthopedic complaints and a host of other physiological conditions.

As a result, more and more facilities are implementing high-quality equipment and training into their locations to fulfill their clients’ unique needs – and qualified pilates instructors, more than ever, have access to the most up-to-date repertoire on the market to meet all of their clients’ needs.

No matter what age, ability or goal, older adults interested in enhancing their health, fitness and lifestyle in general, are enjoying what this method of exercise has to offer. The result is that they have found a newfound method to take back their quality of life and strengthen their core muscles for a pain-free lifestyle.

For more information, visit [www.merrithew.com](http://www.merrithew.com). □