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A black and white photograph of four people standing together, smiling. From left to right: a woman in a light-colored blazer, a man in a suit jacket and white shirt, a woman in a dark blazer and patterned skirt, and a woman in a light-colored blazer with a circular award pin on her lapel. They are standing in front of a dark background with a faint, repeating pattern of a stylized arch or doorway.

Achieving the Pinnacle

Peak performers in
older-adult wellness

The wellness workforce

ICAA survey reveals
industry directions

Water 'fusion' workouts

A format for fun and
fitness in the pool

NuStep Pinnacle Award winners



How to set up a pilates studio for the active aging

When incremental factors such as space, instruction and cost play a large role in your organization's fitness/wellness operations, it's important to examine all your options before the implementation stage

by Lindsay G. Merrithew

Research surveys report that there has been an increase in specialized fitness programming for older adults over the past few years.^{1,2,3} As a result, more and more owners within the active-aging community are choosing to incorporate pilates classes into their fitness and wellness programs and/or build a studio.

Why pilates? Pilates allows exercisers to move within their limitations and can be adapted to enhance anyone's current

training routine. It is a form of exercise for all ages and stages, and a kinder, gentler exercise for the body with the benefits of strength and flexibility training.

"This method of exercise is versatile and can be modified to suit anyone's needs," says Moira Merrithew, director of education for Toronto-based STOTT PILATES® and a leading pilates educator. "Pilates is perfect for the older exerciser," believes Merrithew, "because it helps improve postural problems; increases core strength, stability and peripheral mobility; helps prevent injuries; enhances functional fitness as a whole; improves balance, coordination and circulation; heightens body awareness; and is low impact on the joints."

Determining whether you can afford or even want to open a pilates studio is the first big question. From a programming

perspective, the answer seems quite obvious. But from an owners' perspective, there are more things to consider.

Requirements for equipment studios

"Do I have the space?" is often the first thought that comes to mind. Don't fret; there are some simple solutions. The space you allot to your pilates studio can be relatively small if you choose to have only one or two items of equipment. In fact, some owners opt for 200–300 sq. ft. for one-on-one training or semi-private classes to start. For older exercisers, it isn't recommended to offer equipment or matwork programming to extremely large groups, as these clients require more attention and the instructor will need to assist them more often.

To establish a designated pilates studio, you can use as little as 400–800 sq. ft. The 800-sq.-ft. space is approximately the size of a racquetball court and can comfortably accommodate a fully equipped pilates studio, which includes:

- four Reformers
- two Cadillac Trapeze Tables
- four Stability Chairs
- two Ladder Barrels

and other accessories. (See "Glossary of pilates equipment" on page 40 to learn about the equipment listed above.)

A smaller 400-sq.-ft. studio can hold approximately four Reformers, so at the very least, you can offer programming associated with this essential piece of pilates equipment.

It is also important to designate a space that is located away from distracting rooms—such as where group exercise classes or other leisure activities may be held. Pilates exercisers prefer a peaceful environment that supports a mind-body workout, and this atmosphere should be established with the utmost care and consideration.

Once you find the perfect space to implement your pilates studio, you must make sure to remain realistic about the amount of equipment you can fit in that area, and the type of use the equipment will get. Choose equipment that is versatile and offers maximum programming options to keep your pilates program fresh, challenging and adaptable to the changing requests of your members or residents.

Qualified instructors are key

With a designated space in your facility, staffing is the next key to expanding your business. It is imperative to understand that highly skilled instructors are important for this age group, and that specialized pilates-based equipment requires proper training and programming knowledge.

You now have the ability to offer pilates career opportunities to your existing fitness or wellness staff. If you recruit and train your existing quality personal trainers and group exercise instructors to be pilates instructors, they can subsidize their current client-base and group classes with alternative training methods and grow their clientele.

A studio designed for private, semi-private and group training allows several instructors to work together in the same space while training clients. With a pilates studio on your premises, you can also offer non-staff instructors part-time or full-time positions according to the studio's demand.

Instructors who are looking for a career within this life-stage category require specialized training. Although comprehensive training is crucial, pilates education doesn't stop after certification. It is vital to make sure that your instructors are attending continuing education courses and workshops. By offering training and continuing education, you can show

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What you need to set up shop

1. **The right space.** Small pilates studios can start anywhere from 200–300 sq. ft. for private training or semi-private classes. Small group Reformer training will require at least 400 sq. ft. to house four Reformers, while a fully equipped pilates studio will require approximately 800 sq. ft. of space.
2. **Basic pilates mat program.** Mats are easy to store and maneuver—and may be useful for other fitness classes as well. Matwork can be done with a variety of light equipment or props including, for example, resistance bands and stability balls.
3. **Qualified instructors.** Staff your studio with instructors who are properly trained in pilates, and in particular, in dealing with older clients with potential movement and/or mobility issues.
4. **Equipment pilates.** Even though pilates equipment may look intimidating at first, there are several benefits to incorporating it into your pilates program. The equipment supports and assists the client while the person learns the intricacies of this practice. Equipment-based pilates also includes more full-body work than mat pilates, which can place more focus on the arms and legs as well as the core musculature. Equipment recommendations for first-time pilates owners include Reformers and Stability Chairs.
5. **Advice.** Contact someone from the pilates industry who knows how to build a successful pilates business. If you are unfamiliar with pilates in general, or if you want to expand your current mind-body space, speak to a reputable business consultant within the industry for the best advice to make your venture a success.

How to set up a pilates studio for the active aging

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Glossary of pilates equipment

Cadillac Trapeze Tables: A variety of spring lengths, tensions and multiple attachment sites allow arms and legs to be worked independently to ensure muscle balance and control, and allow more three-dimensional movements in all planes of motion.

Ladder Barrels: Designed to aid in aligning and mobilizing the spine, improving posture and developing balance and control, the Ladder Barrel supports exercises for beginners or fully conditioned exercisers.

Reformers: The most widely used piece of pilates equipment, the Reformer utilizes spring resistance and a smooth gliding carriage to perform hundreds of exercises, which can be adapted to any fitness level.

Stability Chairs: Ideal for those who need to stay in a seated or upright position, the Stability Chair helps rebalance muscles while still providing a full-body workout and is perfect to fit in small spaces.

those dedicated individuals who are already helping you increase membership or resident participation that you care about their professional growth—which, in turn, means organizational growth.

Highly skilled instructors can bring a plethora of exercise variety to your facility and cater to those older adults who may feel intimidated to try pilates. Qualified instructors will also look out for the safety of your members or residents, which is pertinent to the owner and exerciser, and take care of the needs of older clients.

Other considerations

There are some other things to consider in setting up a pilates studio. These include:

- **Temperature.** As with any fitness or wellness facility, you will want to implement a temperature that is comfortable for exercise.
- **Flooring.** Carpet is recommended for your pilates studio for comfort reasons and going from machine to machine, as pilates exercise is most often performed without shoes.
- **Change rooms.** It is highly recommended that you designate specific change rooms for pilates participants away from the regular exercise change rooms—simply because pilates, or any type of mind-body fitness, creates a relaxed atmosphere not to be interrupted by the banging of weights, and the like.
- **Water.** Have water available within the pilates studio. Proper hydration is crucial, and easy access will encourage drinking before, during and after workouts.

A specific room is always desirable for pilates, depending on your facility layout or affordability of space allotment. Use warm tones on the walls and focus on the mind-body “feeling” throughout your area. Finally, avoid distracting lighting or loud music.

‘How do I start?’

Every organization’s needs are unique. In addition, not all facilities are created equal and common obstacles—such as limited resources, space or budget—can seem like barriers to organizations that want to participate in mind-body fitness programs, including pilates. It is important to seek out experts in the pilates industry who can help outline your choices and make your decisions easier. Consultants can provide one-on-one expert advice on everything from staffing and strategic marketing to equipment and studio layout scenarios—all of which will help you on the road to success in no time. ☺

Lindsay G. Merrithew is the president and CEO of STOTT PILATES®, a leader in

the pilates industry. STOTT PILATES offers over 100 workshops for continuing education annually: from rehab for back care and breast cancer, to pilates for golf conditioning and more. Email fullsolutions@stottpilates.com for more information on how to build a successful pilates business for your organization, to host pilates classes or courses, or to find out about STOTT PILATES’ new Active For Life Program (see below for details).

References

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Active for Life workshops

STOTT PILATES continues to expand its continuing education offerings with the recent introduction of its new Active for Life Program. Through this “specialty track” program, facility owners and fitness/wellness instructors can implement or enhance a pilates program geared towards the active-aging population. The Active for Life Program includes workshops that provide instruction in pilates essentials, as well as those designed particularly for an older audience. Some workshops include the use of light equipment and are designed to address the specific needs and concerns of different age and health categories. For more information, email fullsolutions@stottpilates.com.