



# Body, Mind, Mats and More

*Pilates and yoga products that enhance your training sessions*  
*By Moira Merrithew and Charlotte Bell*

## *Pilates Products*

Pilates has proven broad appeal to exercisers of all ages and levels of fitness and agility because of its focus on toning muscles and improving balance and alignment. At its most essential level, Pilates-based exercises help improve performance, reduce injury and alleviate stress. With its focus on breath and concentration, clients work their entire bodies for overall conditioning.

You can economically spruce up their regular workout routine by adding exciting, new dimensions and intensities to basic exercises by way of “props.” Fitness instructors, athletic coaches and even rehab specialists are realizing that in order to keep their clients’ attention and/or enthusiasm for working a specific targeted muscle group or body part, it is often crucial to change the way the move is performed. Therefore, adding a prop or changing the dynamics of a particular move makes all the difference.

**Foam Roller** This long, tubular piece of equipment by its very nature has an unstable base of support. As your client lies supine, they are challenged to maintain balance and coordination as they exercise. If the deep core muscles are not working effectively, they will immediately feel the instability of the roller and lose balance. Add this to their mat workout to instantly increase the level of chal-



**Small Ball** About the size of a volleyball, the miniature stability ball is an effective, inexpensive prop that adds lots of fun to the workout. By placing the ball between the arms or legs, attention is brought to the various muscle groups being worked on, which increases awareness, strength and stability. To increase abdominal strength, place the ball behind the mid-back while supine to increase the range of motion of the spine. By causing the torso to begin in an extended position, the abdominal muscles have to work through a greater range, both concentrically and eccentrically.

**Weighted Balls** For those clients who want to tone without adding bulk to their frame, toning balls are a terrific addition to any program. About the size of a baseball, a toning ball adds weighted conditioning to strengthen the muscles of the periphery. The added weight also encourages the core muscles to work more effectively, especially when moving the spine through various ranges of movements in supine, side-lying and standing positions. Toning balls come in different weights, including one, two and three pounds.

**Resistance Bands** This elastic-type band is a great prop for the avid athlete to post-rehab

clients. The resistance provided can be used to activate the deep stabilizing muscles of the body while also strengthening the outer global mobilizers. Lying on the band lengthwise and performing an ab prep while holding the top end is a great way to alleviate neck tension. With it around the feet and holding each end, the arms add some assistance in flexing the spine.

Pilates enthusiasts can use matwork and/or equipment-based Pilates programming to fulfill their health and fitness goals. But for those who may not be as familiar with this method of exercise yet still feel the need for a change, it's important to know that even a most basic move can be intensified by adding props. So if your clients are getting bored of their regular workout and want more variety, simply add a little something to their basic exercises, and they will feel the burn once again!

*Moira Merrithew, together with President and CEO of STOTT PILATES Lindsay Merrithew and a team of physical therapists, sports medicine and fitness professionals, has spent over two decades refining the STOTT PILATES method of exercise and equipment (www.stottpilates.com). This detailed approach forms the basis for their training and certification programs.*

## Yoga Products

The original personal trainers may have been yogis. From its beginnings 5,000 years ago until the twentieth century, yoga, with all its physical, meditative and daily life practices, was handed down from teacher to student, not in classes, but one-to-one. The infinite, ever-changing physical, mental and emotional variations among human beings necessitated that ancient yogis give unique and personal teachings in the same way personal trainers address the individual physical issues and needs of their clients.

Respect for the uniqueness of each yoga student inspired internationally renowned yoga teacher BKS Iyengar to explore how he might teach groups of students of varying body types to experience ease in their practice, no matter how strong or flexible they might be. In the early twentieth century, Iyengar began experimenting with using props to help people of all body types practice their poses with optimum alignment and ease. ➤

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## [NUTRITION SOLUTIONS]

BY JJ VIRGIN

# ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?



This has been a crazy past month for me of travel back and forth to the East Coast multiple times, so it is fitting that I should write about sleep!

As a nutrition and fitness expert specializing in weight loss resistance, I am frequently asked for the secret, the one thing that you can do that would have the biggest impact on your health and life. The answer may surprise you, but the research is clear, and life experiences of my clients confirm that the single most transformative strategy is *consistent, quality sleep*.

In my field, I know that failure to get the ideal 8.25 hours of sleep a night can make you more insulin-resistant, raise stress hormones, break down muscle, impair muscle building, lower testosterone and Human Growth Hormone, accelerate aging, increase daytime fatigue, increase sugar and carb cravings and put you at risk for obesity, even if you are following a healthy diet and exercise regimen. Sleep, along with diet and exercise, creates the triad of wellness, and poor sleep impacts health, performance, safety and relationships.

But how do you really know if you are getting a good night's sleep? I define it as falling asleep within 15 minutes of your head hitting the pillow, waking up feeling refreshed without an alarm, sleeping through the night without getting up for any reason and sleeping eight to nine hours during the normal circadian rhythm. There are several products on the market to help measure sleep quality. The one I use measures how long it takes me to fall asleep, how many times I wake up during the night and how much time I spend in deep (body restorative), light and REM (mind restorative) sleep, and then it gives me score based on this. It made me realize that you really have no clue how well you are sleeping!

Of course as trainers, we dread the client that comes dragging into the gym after staying up too late finishing a project (or, subsequently, celebrating finishing said project) because we know that their performance that day will be substandard, and they will probably be a bit cranky as well. Take time to educate your client on the importance of quality sleep. Check if they are doing any of the classic sleep stealers, including exercising too soon before bedtime, drinking more than one serving of alcohol in the evening, eating dinner too late, napping during the day, drinking caffeine after noon or engaging in stimulating activities before bedtime (email, arguing, etc.). Guide them to good sleep hygiene strategies — my favorite is adopting the Power-Down Hour, which means that one hour before bedtime, you start preparing for sleep: shutting down the computer, dimming the lights, taking a bath, reading a good (but not great!) book, etc.

Supporting your clients' quality sleep enhances your value as a trainer by taking a comprehensive approach to wellness, plus you will have a much better time training your well-rested clients!

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*JJ Virgin, PhD, CNS, CHFI, is a celebrity nutrition and fitness expert, author, public speaker and media personality. She is internationally recognized as an authority in overcoming weight loss resistance and trains other health care professionals in her program. JJ is the president of the National Association of Nutrition Professionals ([www.nanp.org](http://www.nanp.org)).*

Iyengar's original props, including non-skid mats, straps, blocks, blankets, bolsters and various types of "yoga furniture," have been not only duplicated but, in some cases, refined and improved by manufacturers around the world. Yoga props, though they were originally designed for yoga practice, can be a great support to any kind of physical training. Here are a few basic props that can enhance any personal training session:

**Non-skid Mats** Non-skid mats are a staple of yoga practice. You can't predict on what kind of surface your clients will practice their regimens at home: hardwood, carpet, concrete, ceramic, cork, vinyl, etc. A non-skid mat, also known as a "sticky mat," provides a safe, consistent surface for practice. These mats not only resist sliding on most floors, but they also supply some friction underneath slippery hands and feet, helping to keep your client stable and safe in any position. They also provide cushioning for bony joints.

Because of variations in body chemistry, body type and environmental sensibility, there's a plethora of mat types on the market. These include long-lasting, PVC-based mats, from thin to cushy; biodegradable mats of various thicknesses; lightweight travel mats; and heavy-duty professional mats — all in a variety of colors and designs.

**Straps** Straps are one of yoga's "equalizing" props. Not everyone can touch their toes, and it's better not to force it. Straps can give even those with the stiffest hamstrings the stabilizing experience of holding onto their own feet. By spanning the distance between hands and feet in forward bending movements, straps allow practitioners to hold their feet without compromising spinal alignment. Straps are also useful in a variety of chest-expanding movements.

Straps are available in a variety of lengths, buckle styles and webbing types. The strongest are made of cotton or hemp webbing, and there are organic options for the eco-minded. Buckle styles include traditional steel D-rings as well as lightweight, plastic quick-release and "cinch" buckles.

**Blocks** In seated twisting or forward-bending stretches, people with inflexible hamstrings and hips often have no choice but to round their spines, which can put damaging pressure on intervertebral discs in the lumbar area. A well-placed block under the sitting bones can raise the pelvis just enough to allow it to tilt forward, letting the spine return to its natural curves, which helps keep these discs safe.

In yogic standing postures, including simple standing forward bends, placing hands on a block can relieve pressure in the back and allow for optimal spinal alignment. Using blocks in forward bends and twists is especially useful for people with disc issues in L4 to L5 and L5 to S1.

Blocks come in many sizes and types and can be made from wood, cork and foam in several widths and heights for all individual needs.

Yoga has endured for 5,000 years precisely because it's been allowed to evolve. The relatively recent development of props has opened yoga practice up to the widest audience ever, giving teachers and students infinite options for satisfying practice. Adding yoga props to personal training gives trainers the opportunity to develop new ways to optimize their clients' daily routines. With a little creative experimentation, personal trainers can use props to widen their clients' options, too.

*Charlotte Bell has taught yoga and meditation classes, workshops and teacher trainings in Salt Lake City and beyond since 1986. She is the author of the book, *Mindful Yoga, Mindful Life: A Guide for Everyday Practice*, published by Rodmell Press. ●*