

FINDING RELIEF FROM CHRONIC PAIN

By: Rachel Zabonick

Around 18 months ago, Becky Woodington, 56, was diagnosed with severe spinal stenosis, anteriorlisthesis and degenerative disc disease — conditions that affected her back and caused her to be in chronic pain. Instead of seeking relief from her discomfort through medication, Woodington looked for ways to seek relief through exercise. A 15-year member at the Colorado Athletic Club (CAC) Inverness, she signed up for private STOTT PILATES® lessons with Natalie Gennett, the Pilates coordinator at CAC.

Many people diagnosed with Woodington's conditions require surgery and experience muscle weakness. In some instances, severe spinal stenosis can even lead to paralysis. Woodington turned to Gennett in hopes of counteracting some of the worst possible symptoms of her condition. The issue she struggled with the most was mobility — the muscles around her spine felt extremely tight, inhibiting movement. Fortunately, Pilates helped with this particular side effect. "With my condition your body freezes up," said Woodington. "Pilates is the number one thing that gives you space in your spine to

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give you range of motion."

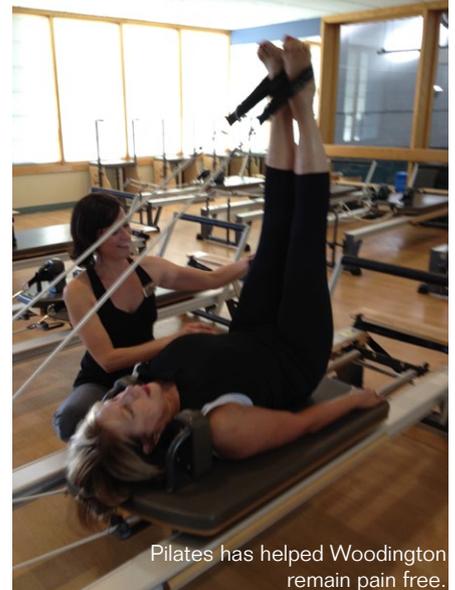
With Woodington's condition in mind, Gennett personalized the STOTT PILATES method to accommodate for Woodington's pain and stiffness. "With Becky's injury, postural programming is key, and also listening to information she is providing from her experiences with her doctors, surgeons and other practitioners," explained Gennett. "Her muscles around her hips and her hamstrings, for example, feel very tight to her because they are constantly contracting to stabilize her spine. I work on bringing balance to those areas and restoring her to pain free and functional. I know

we have success by the way she feels by the end of the session."

However, Woodington's condition causes some limitations. Implementing cardiovascular exercises into Woodington's routine has been an issue the duo tackled with the STOTT PILATES Cardio-Tramp™. A trampoline, the Cardio-Tramp allowed Woodington to conduct low-impact cardio and blast calories. "Becky enjoys it, which is key in any exercise program," said Gennett. "I use all the STOTT PILATES equipment to vary the routine, always including the Cadillac, and proprioceptive and balance training tools like rotational discs and the mini-stability ball."

Woodington has taken Pilates lessons at a different facility, but said that nothing compared to her private lessons with Gennett. "She's extremely attentive to every muscle you move — everything has to be a certain way," said Woodington. "It's amazing how our bodies tend to do the same thing over and over again incorrectly. Natalie makes you focus on the correct area to get the proper movement."

Since working with Gennett, Woodington has been fortunate to remain virtually pain free on most days. "Most people who know my condition can't



Pilates has helped Woodington remain pain free.

believe it," said Woodington. "I used to go to the Colorado Athletic Club to work out, and now I go there to get well."

It's important for clubs to create options for members who have physical limitations such as Woodington's, and Pilates is a great way to do that. It's also important to stress that pain isn't always normal. "I feel that often in a gym environment people push through pain, either out of their own perception of what working out is, or because that is the culture the club promotes via their marketing and staff," said Gennett. "Especially as people move out of their 20s and 30s, they do too much 'going for the burn,' and too much pushing, period, when it would benefit them to take stock, listen to their pain and find better, healthier, more functional approaches to working their bodies. It's important that clubs reach members with that message," she said.

How do you teach your members about managing pain? Maybe Pilates is the answer for many of your members. Spend some time asking what their issues might be, and think about some new ways to help them enjoy life, pain free. **CS**



Woodington works with Gennett during a private Pilates session.