

# Pilates does the body good – inside and out!

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Fitness enthusiasts can spice up their routines and serious athletes can reach a new level in their sport. Here's why more and more trainers are introducing pilates to their clients for new and improved workouts.

BY KERRIE LEE BROWN

**A**thletes are always looking for new ways to build strength, increase energy, and get in shape for their favourite sport. They're always looking for the newest exercise to expand their physical potential and push themselves to the limits; or the latest training technique to tone and strengthen their muscles to get ahead of the competition.

Pilates is becoming an integral part of fitness facility programming over the past decade. According to the 2007 IDEA Fitness Programs and Equipment Survey, 68 percent of facilities surveyed have pilates as one of their program offerings. This jump is due in large part to the fact that pilates has evolved over time and is now focusing on the modern day biomechanics of the athlete's body with essential scientific research. This second generation of pilates caters to athletic performance enhancement and gym owners are making pilates programs more accessible for their patrons.



## Benefits for athletes

Pilates helps build strong, healthy muscles, improves blood flow, develops the core, improves flexibility, and engages all the muscles effectively. It works your body from the inside-out for optimal body conditioning; assists with rehabilitation after injury; and can help maintain an optimal

weight for the activity of choice.

"Pilates works on developing kinesthetic awareness of the body, or where it is in relationship to itself, and the world around it. It also focuses on good postural alignment which will help an individual perform a movement efficiently thus reducing the amount of unnecessary strain on the muscles and joints," explains Moira Merrithew, Executive Director of Education for STOTT PILATES. "Specific strengthening exercises will also help



## What are the benefits for athletes?

- Improves lung capacity and oxygen to the blood
- Helps achieve overall sense of satisfaction inside and out
- Assists with rehabilitation of injury and prevention
- Relieves stress and helps with athletic focus
- Enhances stamina, coordination, and flexibility

all stages from the most acute phase to advanced functional re-education.

According to Matt Nichol, Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Toronto Maple Leafs, pilates teaches athletes to be mindful in their movements – integrating their pelvis, trunk, and shoulder girdle in a safe, challenging, and progressive system. “Pilates can be a very effective supplement to an injury re-habilitation program as it provides athletes with a challenging workout without impact or excessive weight bearing.”

## Summary

Traditional training will help develop the muscles required in a specific sport, but may not address the stabilizing muscles around the joints or the torso. Often, one muscle is identified and exercises designed to isolate that muscle, usually in a single plane of motion, are used.

Pilates exercises can be more complex than traditional moves and will therefore recruit a larger number of muscle groups or strengthen the same muscles from many angles and in a variety of different ranges of motion. As a result, athletes are open to including pilates in their regimens to enhance their athletic ability on a physical level while working the inner mechanism of the body. □

to re-balance the muscles around the joints – creating more strength with flexibility.”

Most pilates workouts begin in a supine (lying on the back) position, and then progress to sitting or standing when stability increases and can then carry over into the sporting realm. This allows the athlete to train or retrain muscles, then transfer movement patterns to outside the practice environment and into the sport-specific skill. Some resources have identified seven physical performance factors including: posture, balance, mobility/flexibility, stability, coordination, functional strength, and endurance all of which are essential for elite athletic performance.

## The pros and pilates

Many pro athletes are incorporating pilates into their regular training regimens. Athletes such as Tiger Woods, Jason Kidd, pitcher Curt Schilling, pro hockey player Carlo Colaiacovo, and offensive lineman, Ruben Brown have all been noted to add pilates to their routines. Why? Well, one concept being

embraced by sports trainers is called LATD or Long-Term Athletic Development.

The training progresses from general to specific and from simple to more complex. The lighter resistance and multi-angular training makes pilates perfect for LATD as well as anatomical adaptation, which focuses on developing muscle memory and patterning. This usually occurs in the preparatory or pre-competition phase of training for an athlete.

There are other areas of sport training in which pilates can be particularly useful. Regeneration is the period of active recovery from a strenuous workout or game. Pilates can help in fulfilling this role and returning muscles and joints to their anatomical length.

Also, perfect for rehabilitation, pilates can provide an interim step between non weight-bearing to open-chain, explosive movements. The focus on mobility, flexibility, and strength through a full range of motion helps restore the injured tissues to a healthy state before sport specific training begins. In rehab, pilates can be used at



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