

For Almost a Century, Pilates Has Been The Exercise of Choice For Strength And Mobility

By [Amanda Lee](#) - August 14, 2018



Photo: Flickr/Creative Commons, www.runwaypilates.com

Pilates is about as far away as you can get from trendy exercise fads. It has been practiced since the late 1920's. And believe it or not, there really is a Mr. Pilates. Joseph Pilates, a German gymnast, is credited with inventing and promoting this method of physical fitness. He and his wife, Clara, opened the first studio in New York City in the 1920s, which quickly became popular with the dance community.

With its focus on functional movement, postural alignment and overall conditioning, Pilates can be a great choice for improving mobility and strength, especially for older Canadians. Though it has been around for almost a century, it's not widely understood.



Pilates focuses on core body strength, postural alignment and overall conditioning, making it a favourite for dancers and many others.. Photo: Flickr/Creative Commons, [mitsy mcgoo.](#)

[Laureen DuBeau](#) has been a Toronto-based Pilates teacher for over 20 years and travels worldwide as a Merrithew instructor trainer. “Pilates can be seen as kinder and gentler form of exercises that will maximize fitness goals regardless of fitness levels or health related issues,” she says.

Not sure where to begin? DuBeau suggests a well-educated Pilates instructor will be one of your primary assets. “Look for an instructor or a studio offering recognized Pilates training, particularly ones touting credentials in working with older adults,” she advises.

Louise Veres, a life coach based in Niagara Falls, ON, took up regular Pilates classes at [Movement Unlimited Inc.](#) two years ago. “It’s like swimming where you don’t feel it, but you’re still doing it,” she says.



An experienced instructor can modify movements to suit a wide range of fitness levels. Photo: Flickr/Creative Commons, Herald Post.

Anecdotally, a well-designed Pilates program can be beneficial to a lot of issues, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and other auto-immune disorders, scoliosis, low back issues, sciatica, stress and anxiety and muscle atrophy.

Veres found it easier on her body than other forms of exercise, such as running, while still giving her a full workout. “It’s improves different muscles, alleviated muscle strain, improved my flexibility and helped me play a round of golf,” she says.

Essentially, there are two types of Pilates classes – Mat and Reformer. DuBeau explains mat work primarily comprises of exercises done on a mat, incorporating light equipment like small balls, fitness circles or resistance bands.

Reformer Pilates is performed on a specialized piece of equipment featuring a sliding platform with spring resistance that facilitates hundreds of exercises targeting the core, back, arms and legs. “These classes can also be individualized,” explains DuBeau, “so any limitations can be addressed and an appropriate workout designed for each individual.”

Veres takes both Mat and Reformer classes at her local studio. “I found it was a good workout. You use a lot of muscles that you may not use in other forms of exercise,” she says.



Paying attention to body alignment helps boost strength and improve posture. Photo: Flickr/Creative Commons, www.runwaypilates.com.

Before starting, consider your personal limitations. “Are osteoarthritis or osteoporosis a concern? Do you find it difficult to get down on the floor to exercise? Do you have problems with balance, or getting in and out of a chair?” asks Dubeau. “An experienced instructor will be able to modify the exercises to accommodate any limitations, continually challenge within ability, and monitor improvements.”

When commencing with any new exercise program, it’s also good practice to speak to your doctor first. When it comes to your Pilates practice, dress comfortably in workout gear that is form fitting enough for your instructor to see how well you are executing each move. It’s also important to stay hydrated and drink plenty of water before and after a class.

“A well-designed Pilates program should leave you feeling energized and motivated, not stiff and sore,” says DuBeau.

Still not convinced? Pilates devotees include Madonna, Sandra Bullock, Sharon Stone, David Beckham, Susan Sarandon and Hugh Grant.

As Veres suggests: “Go with an open mind and try it. It’s a great form of exercise.”

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