



# Swap Stress for Serotonin

Give Your Clients the Gift of Reduced Stress This Holiday Season

by the Merrithew Health & Fitness™ Team

**D**espite being a festive time filled with loved ones, the holiday season can also often be equated to feelings of being overwhelmed, stressed and a general sense of chaos. During this busyness, exercising is one of the first things to fall off of people's priority lists, but give your clients a reason not to let this happen; keeping the body active with conscious, mindful movement gives the ability to be present, reduce stress, and enjoy a jolt of energy.

STOTT PILATES® has an excellent reputation as a method that develops strength, flexibility and endurance but comes with a host of other benefits that can positively influence day-to-day life. As pilates has a mind-body connectivity focus, it provides a number of mental and physical bonuses that will make holiday season survival much more manageable.

## Be Present and Engaged

Pilates requires a deep introspection and self-awareness, providing the opportunity to take a mental break from daily distractions. Different from activities that focus on high intensity, this style of

workout demands focus and intention, squeezing out thoughts of external pressures and providing the mind with some relief in order to focus on the activity at hand.

A mindful presence allows us to observe our thoughts and experiences as they are and has been reported to increase happiness, enjoy a more relaxed state of mind and lower stress levels. As a trainer, if you're able to offer your clients these types of positive benefits, chances are you'll see these patrons more often.

## Enjoy Relief from Stress

As a calming and energizing activity, after a pilates workout it's common to feel a relaxed frame of mind and a renewed sense of stamina. Well documented for years, physical activity releases endorphins and serotonin, resulting in feelings of euphoria. Who doesn't want to feel happier during the holidays, or at any other time of the year?!

Also, while breathing is an easily-overlooked detail, proper breath technique and pattern will properly engage the core and may also relieve symptoms of stress, which as an added bonus can

provide relief from back pain, an ailment common to some 80% of North Americans. Proper pilates breathing encourages filling the ribcage with air on each inhale. This results in each individual rib lifting and separating, thereby creating space and length through the back and providing a relieving spinal stretch.

When we consciously set aside time to release tension and energize both mind and body, in turn we're also reducing stress, improving and restoring focus, increasing productivity and creating a positive outlet for stress management.

### Keep Up With the Physical Demands of the Holidays

While the holidays may be mentally exhausting, they can be physically exhausting as well. From needing the stamina to endure the shopping for presents, being on your toes at various events and gatherings, plus slaving over a hot stove in the kitchen, the body needs to be physically prepped for such an energy-demanding season.

Whether doing mat- or reformer-based training, pilates focuses on increasing muscular strength, building endurance and improving body alignment, including posture and proper biomechanics. Pilates is a functional activity that addresses and engages the entire kinetic chain and teaches how to stabilize and move the whole body concurrently. Many of the mindful movements in pilates make the body more efficient by ensuring that all stabilizing systems are operating properly.

Consistent practice of pilates promotes correct postural alignment and teaches the body to move more naturally. A common finding is that individuals tend to tuck or tilt the pelvic region, creating tightness and/or weakness that can result in discomfort. Pilates brings an awareness of proper placement and alignment, strengthening the neutral spine making daily tasks less taxing on the body.

When clients put working out on the backburner this holiday season, remind them to take advantage of the opportunity to renew their sense of self and spirit through mindful movement. They can look forward to feeling happier and less stressed which will benefit them and everyone around them too.



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