

UNIQUE WAYS TO BOOST YOUR ROUTINE WITH PROPS!

Even the Simplest of Exercises Can be Ramped-up to Challenge Your Core



If you're reading this magazine, then you are most likely already an avid exerciser and used to visiting the gym, or you are new to the world of fitness and realize the benefits of adding exercise into your daily regimen. Either way, good for you! Working out is one of the best things you can do for yourself. It will change the way you look and more importantly, how you feel about yourself.

As someone who has worked in the fitness industry for a long time, I've seen a lot of people start exercise programs with every intention of following through, only to quit after a few months because they become bored with their routine. Hey, I've even been there myself. But one thing's for sure, whether you work out with a trainer or on your own, it's important to maintain a high level of enthusiasm for your program—otherwise you'll want to throw in the towel. Because we all know that it can be tough doing the same moves over and over again, 3-4 times a week.

The good news is that when it comes to exercising, Pilates leads the way in innovative ways to keep you motivated and up for the challenge. There is a large misconception that Pilates involves very intricate moves that only dancers would be able to execute, or requires large equipment that is bulky, hard to obtain, and expensive. But what most people don't know is that Pilates can just as easily be incorporated into regular workout programs by using a few basic props that can be found around your gym or fitness facility.

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

However, it's important to keep in mind that some popular Pilates exercises can put strain on the low back in people with typical postural imbalances. The good news is that there are numerous basic exercises that can be performed and/or

modified on the mat that can be helpful, in addition to an already-established workout program.

For instance, light Pilates equipment such as 1-pound, 2-pound or 3-pound Toning Balls™ can help close the kinetic chain, add proprioceptive awareness, and add challenge to exercises by increasing the load, or destabilizing the base of support.

Stick to the Basics

Pilates matwork is the foundation of the exercise system. All the basic exercises are designed to target very specific muscle groups in very specific ways. In the STOTT PILATES® method, the Five Basic Principles are used to help ensure the movements are being done effectively.

"Pilates focuses on the balance of concentric and eccentric strengthening of muscles, rather than excessive static strengthening," explains Moira Merrithew, co-founder and Executive Director of Education for STOTT PILATES.® "This results in maintaining the integrity and strength of the muscles around the joints, while allowing them to move more freely, in a greater range."

It is widely-known that Pilates-based exercises help improve performance, reduce injury, and relieve stress. Unlike other hardcore strength-training regimens that focus more specifically on muscle mass, Pilates focuses on toning your muscles, thereby improving your balance and alignment.

"Pilates also assists in rehabilitation after injury and creates balance throughout the entire body," adds Merrithew. "Pilates is a form of overall strength and conditioning used in the development of strong core muscles and joint stability, which also focuses on breathing, balance and range of motion."

Core Connection

By incorporating 'variations' to exercises with light equipment (or props), the peripheral muscles are targeted, and this allows the exerciser to focus in a slightly different way.

Altering the way an exercise is performed allows the neuromuscular system to be challenged in a new way, requiring new pathways to be developed, which makes the brain work harder.

One of the best examples is the 'Ab Prep' which can be performed on a mat. By adding various props to this move, you will rejuvenate a basic Pilates exercise that works the core and will literally add 'punch' to your workout in no time. The Ab Prep is one of the most basic mat exercises and can be modi-

fied based on the equipment used and the intensity of the exercise. The basic exercise is as follows:

Starting position lying supine on the mat, pelvis and spine in a neutral position, knees flexed with feet flat on mat hip-distance apart, hands resting by sides. Inhale: to prepare, exhale: nod head and flex head and upper torso off the mat, keeping the lumbar spine in neutral, inhale: maintain position, exhale: lower upper torso to mat.

Variety is the Spice of Life

The following are variations of the Ab Prep, incorporating a variety of high-caliber Pilates props that can be found around most fitness facilities:

1. Ab Prep with Toning Balls™

Toning Balls are used to bring awareness to scapulae stabilization.

2. Ab Prep with Mini Stability Ball™

The Mini Stability Ball increases the range of motion by allowing the upper torso to be extended over the ball in the starting position. This puts the abdominal muscles in an elongated position to start and encourages a broader range of spinal movement.

3. Ab Prep with Fitness Circle®

With the Fitness Circle resistance ring placed between the knees, the Ab Prep is performed with more emphasis placed on the lower body, especially the adductors of the inner thighs.

4. Ab Prep with Flex-Band®

With the Flex-Band exerciser around the feet, this variation provides some resistance to the arms, by flexing the elbows to perform biceps curls. Another variation would be to biceps curl for 3-5 reps, while in the flexed position.

5. Ab Prep on the Stability Ball

Performed in the supine-incline position, the rounded Stability Ball takes the shape of the spine, allowing a greater range of motion. Alternately, with the hips lifted in a bridge position and the head and upper back supported on the ball, emphasis is also now placed on the hip extensors to stabilize the pelvis (hamstrings and glutes).

6. Ab Prep on the Pilates Edge®

The Pilates Edge is ideal for either increasing or decreasing the challenge of the standard Ab Prep. With the head at the higher end, gravity assists the spinal flexion, while still supporting the torso. When done with the feet at the higher end, resistance from gravity is increased, as is the challenge to the abdominal muscles.



7. Ab Prep on the Foam Roller

An excellent way to improve balance and control, performing the Ab Prep on the unstable Foam Roller requires increased work from all layers of abdominals, as well as the legs.

Ramp Up Your Routine

Pilates enthusiasts can use matwork and/or equipment-based Pilates programming to fulfill their health and fitness goals. But for those of you who may not be as familiar with this method of exercise, but feel the need for a change, it's important to know that even the most basic of moves can be intensified by adding props.

Fitness facilities are realizing this as well. So, if you're getting bored with your regular workout and want to 'spice up' your training—just add a little something to your basic exercises and feel the burn once again! ■

For more information on STOTT PILATES® exercises, education and equipment, visit www.stotpilates.com

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