

Pilates at Home!

Pilates is a very precise method of body conditioning and most effective when practiced with a certified instructor. Included here are some exercises you may add to your current program and practice at home.

Balancing

To strengthen pelvic floor.

Practice standing on one leg. This can even be done while doing the dishes, watching TV or brushing your teeth. Stand in good Pilates stance with feet hip width apart, arches of feet lifted, weight evenly distributed through the toes and heel. Ribcage is directly over the pelvis with tailbone reaching down (no arching and sticking the butt out). Back of the neck lengthens and remember to engage pelvic floor. Then, maintain hips as you just lift the R heel (imagine a slide from your right hip bone to your right knee). Replace the heel. Again, lift the heel then bring the R foot to rest on the L. A good image is to imagine your L leg as a tree trunk (very stable) and a good trick is to remember the inners (adductors) of the standing leg (L in this instance) pushing toward the center of the body. Balance for 1 minute. To increase the challenge, hover the foot in front of you instead of resting on the opposite foot. You can slowly increase the time you balance, adding time in 30-second intervals.

Standing Spine Twist

Great obliques exercise...among other things!

Stand tall with feet & legs together, organize the body so your sternun (bone between the ribs) stacks right over your pubic bone...tip: abdominals are pulling in and working, arms straight out to each side like the letter T. Keep shoulders away from the ears and hips stay facing forward. A small range of motion with hips staying facing forward is much more effective than greater range with hips shifting. Inhale and twist right, exhale hold. Inhale and twist a tiny bit further right and exhale belly sinks to bring body back to center. Any of the standing Pilates exercises are especially great because they are weight bearing which is good for the prevention of osteoporosis.

Swimming

A great exercise to strengthen the upper back.

Lying face down with legs extended straight (parallel and hip width apart with pointed toes) and arms extended straight overhead. Begin with the belly pulled into the spine, a gentle bun squeeze (engaging pelvic floor causes sitz bones to move toward each other, this is the sensation we are interested in), and pubic bone pressure into the mat/floor. With the arms extended overhead, imagine sliding your shoulders blades down your back, and keep the shoulders dropping away from the ears. Inhale to prepare and on an exhale, pelvic floor engages and belly button sinks into the spine (protecting the lower back) then upper body lifts off the mat. It is important to arch in the upper back and not the lower back. Inhale once again and on the exhale lift both legs just a few inches off the floor. Legs remain straight (be careful not to bend the knees or hyperextend at the knees). Imagine you are swimming free-style. The torso remains still and abdominals pulled in while the arms and legs are alternating swimming motion. The right arm and left leg move upward together while the left arm and right leg move downward together, then, alternating motions. Arms and legs must not touch the floor in the downward movements. Move arms and legs only, the torso remains still. Neck remains long (it is an extension of the spine) with eyes focused on floor. To modify this exercise, work the upper & lower body separately. Do 10 reps.

Bridging

To lengthen the lower back and strengthen the hamstrings.

Lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor, legs are hip width apart with heels in line with the sits bones. Ankles should be directly under the knees. Arms are by your side, palms down and shoulders feel relaxed into floor with chest open to the sky. Inhale to prepare and on the exhale, tilt the pelvis so the belly button sinks into the floor while the pubic bone tilts toward the sky. Using your abdominal muscles, articulate the spine up into a plank position. Inhale to hold the position and on an exhale, unbridge in the same manner. Belly sinks to the spine and the upper back reaches to the mat, then midback and sequentially until the tailbone touches down to starting position. To challenge and strengthen the hamstrings, bridge up as described and maintain the bridge position. Lengthen one leg straight out and feel the muscles on the back of the opposite leg working to maintain the position. It is important to maintain level hips. The hip of the extended leg may like to drop toward the floor; don't let this happen. Return the leg to starting position and alternate to extend the other leg. Do 4 reps each leg. After the extensions, unbridge as described.

Leg Circles

Core stabilizes and lots of leg muscles get to work too!

Lie supine on the mat, feel shoulder blades and spine sink into the mat, legs are reaching long. Hips are parallel. Inhale to prepare and on an exhale, slowly slide the right leg into the body, dragging heel along floor using belly and hamstring to bring leg in. Then, lengthen right leg to the sky. Check to be sure hips stay parallel. It's okay for leg to be a bit bent if hamstrings are tight. Inhale to prepare, exhale circle the leg. Remember your circle size must be such that you are able to keep the entire rest of the body still. You may start with by imagining you could draw a circle around an orange on the ceiling above with your toe. Core strength works to stabilize the body. Circle 5 times in each direction, then you can gradually move up to 10 in each direction and also you can slowly increase the size of your circle. After circling both directions, bend the leg and slide the heel out, hamstring pulling the leg back toward the floor until leg is straight out just the same way you brought it in. Next, switch legs!

Have fun, remember to stretch – and, of course BREATHE!

Pilates Connection LLC
www.mypilatesconnection.com