

## Pilates for Body Conditioning

Exercising your body for strength and fitness is important, but it's not always enough. For overall wellness, you need to condition your entire body. The Pilates Method is an excellent way to do just this.

Joseph Pilates created the Pilates Method in the 1920s. After overcoming a childhood plagued by rickets and asthma, Mr. Pilates was later motivated to make his weak body stronger through yoga, wrestling and gymnastics. This desire to overcome personal weakness led Joseph Pilates to make a lifelong commitment to exercise, and led to the creation of one of the greatest exercise programs of all time, the Pilates Method.

Pilates for body conditioning involves more than 500 exercises. This immense collection of movements is divided into two main categories: those performed on a floor mat (mat work), and that involving specialized exercise equipment, such as the Cadillac, barrel and chair. Although different in application, both categories of Pilates Method exercises were developed around the same fundamental principles, and they all involve similar types of body movement.

While other forms of exercise focus primarily on building muscle bulk or increasing cardiovascular stamina, the Pilates Method exercises stress and highlight the importance of performing deliberate movements that fully engage both the mind and body. This "head to toe" experience is why the program is often referred to as Pilates for body conditioning.

Qualified and knowledgeable instructors will stress that the Pilates Method is an all-encompassing conditioning program that improves muscle control, flexibility, strength and coordination. People who practice Pilates must understand and uphold the fundamental principles: to increase awareness of the body as a single integrated unit, to enhance breathing and alignment, and to increase the efficiency of movement. If correctly practicing Pilates for body conditioning, you'll find that many of the deeper muscles work simultaneously, improving your coordination while achieving efficient and graceful movement.

Joseph Pilates understood the importance of proper breathing, and knew that breathing could actually direct energy to vital areas, while relaxing and calming the rest of the body. For this reason, every exercise involved in the Pilates Method is accompanied by a prescribed placement, rhythm and breathing pattern.

Another basic principle of the Pilates Method is that people ought to view their bodies as single, integrated units. Therefore, the very premise of Pilates is built on exercises that support the central core or "powerhouse", made up of the buttocks, lower back and abdominal region. All other movement freely takes place around this stabilized central core.

Pilates for body conditioning is all about quality, not quantity. The focus is on performing a number of precise movements correctly, rather than enduring countless repetitions of the same motions. Many of the recommended exercises performed during a Pilates session are repeated ten times, while some of the more challenging movements are repeated just three or four times. Despite the relative small number of reps, most Pilates practitioners are aware of positive results within ten sessions. By this time, they are comfortable with the choreography, and are able to concentrate on their bodies rather than focus on how to perform the exercises.

The Pilates Method's strong emphasis on strength and flexibility makes it a popular choice for professional dancers, particularly those performing in the ballet. Gymnasts, football players and other athletes wishing to focus on their physical and emotional wellness also choose Pilates for body conditioning. Performers, athletes and "average" people who perform Pilates enjoy feelings of revitalization, as opposed to exhaustion. It's believed that the balance of mind and body brings about overall balance and wellness.

Is Pilates for everyone? While the exercises are gentle enough to be performed during pregnancy, they are also sophisticated enough to challenge even the most physically fit individuals. There are variations on the fundamental exercises, with modifications available to suit people of all fitness levels. This is what makes Pilates for body conditioning a great choice for anyone seeking a leaner, stronger, more balanced body.