

DANCE SPIRIT'S

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WINTER 1999-2000

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- Tone Up Those Upper Arms
- Perfect Your Fouetté Turn
- Condition With Pilates





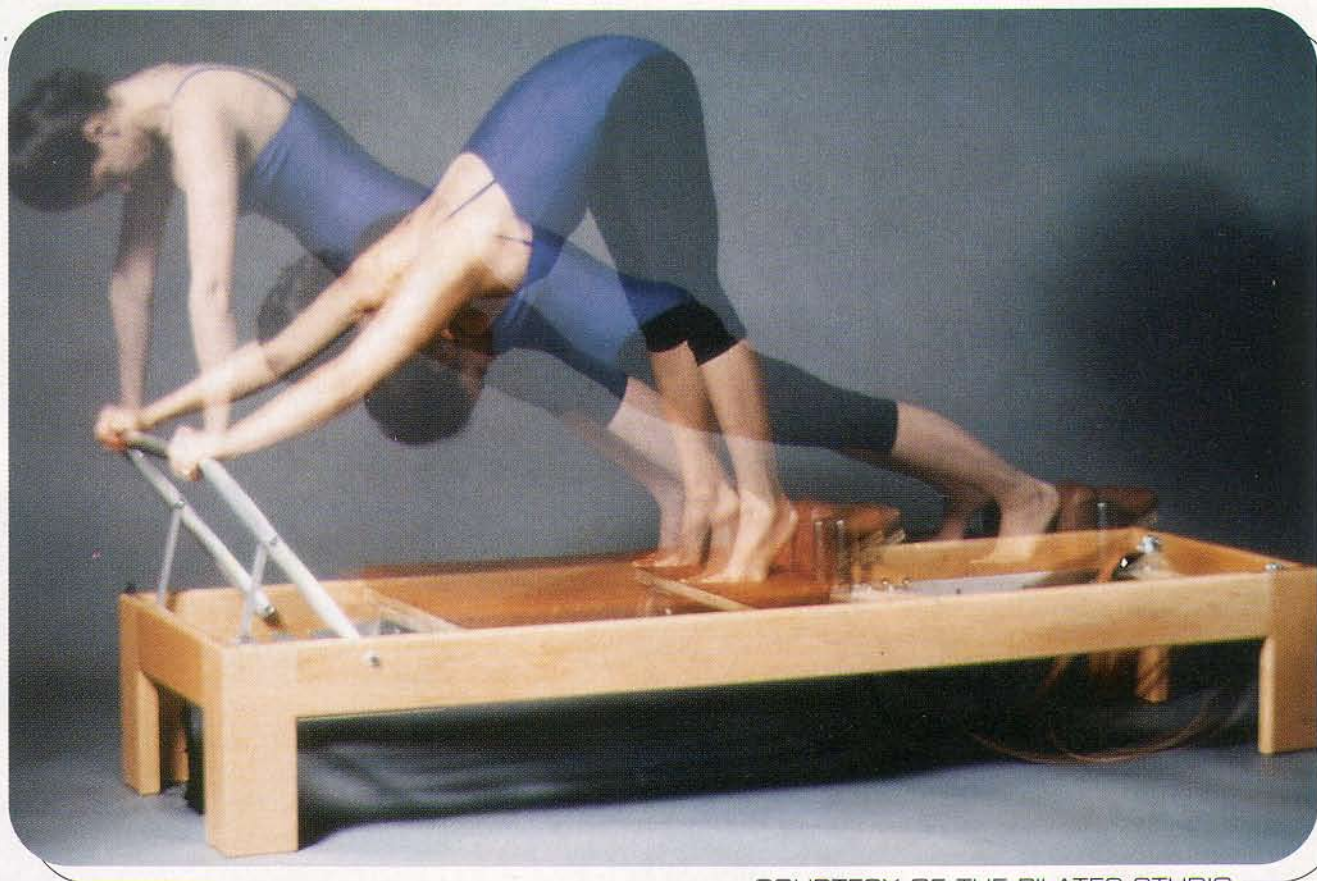
Pilates:

Encouraging proper technique through conditioning

by Valerie S. Potsos 

You've stretched, aerobicized and lifted weights, but you need more conditioning. What else can you do? Try Pilates (pronounced puh-LA-tees). A combination of Eastern and Western ideas mixed with yoga, Pilates is a series of 500 exercises developed

by Joseph Pilates seventy years ago. Some are performed on a mat, while others use specially designed equipment. But most importantly, Pilates develops deep strength, increases range of motion and assists in injury rehabilitation.



COURTESY OF THE PILATES STUDIO

BENEFITS

"When it comes to a performance group's precision and technical skills, benefits include a firmer, sleeker body, less fatigue, increased muscle flexibility and strength without bulky muscles," says Elyssa Rosenberg, associate director of The Pilates Studio in New York.

As it develops the abdominals, for instance, the method also encourages proper technique. "It allows the dancer to lift through the center without gripping the superficial muscles or tucking the pelvis, which are very common bad dance habits," says Cathie Caraker, instructor at the School of New Dance Development in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Pilates work helps decrease team injuries. "It's great at focusing the team on learning the difference between simply performing a movement and performing it exactly right. Strengthening benefits will be in the ab and back muscles that give the dancers increased stability and put them at less risk for injury," says Alycea Baylis Ungaro, owner of Tribeca Bodyworks in New York.

PROGRESSIONS

"Each exercise builds upon the next," says Rosenberg. In an ideal situation, one-on-one training precedes group instruction. But dance teams and guards can start with a group mat class. "Teams should have the same teacher every week so that the instructor can modify exercises for each member," says Ungaro. "Matwork's advantage is that you can do it anywhere," says Caraker. "You can use cheap, portable physioballs and therabands, too."

"Pilates is about control," says Amy Taylor Alpers, founder of the Pilates Center in Boulder, Colorado. "Strength begins in the 'core'—the abdominals. Forward flexion is emphasized first; then when awareness, strength and flexibility are achieved, twisting and spinal extension exercises are introduced. Progression to each level occurs when the body has acquired enough muscular balance to add the next exercise with success and without fear of injury."

FINDING A CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR

Pilates Inc. is the national organization that certifies teachers in the Pilates Method of Body Conditioning. This trademarked program requires a year of study and exams, including 600 apprenticeship hours. Cautions Rosenberg, "What are referred to as 'Pilates-based' programs do not teach the same technique."

Expect to pay \$13/hour for a group session to \$60/hour for individual instruction. However, not all studios are expensive; shop around. To find a certified instructor and studio in your area, call 800-474-5283 or in New York, 212-875-0189.

PILATES POINTS

- Joseph Pilates, who developed the technique, originally used it in working with boxers.
- Dancers who've raved about Pilates include Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, George Balanchine, Hanya Holm, Martha Graham and Jerome Robbins.
- The method involves over 500 different exercises, drawing on natural movement, the developmental process, yoga, German and Swedish gymnastics and Greek and Roman exercise.
- The focus of the system is on strengthening the area around your center of gravity and teaching you to work from the inside out, increasing your strength, flexibility, balance and breath control along the way.

—Sean P. Gallagher

World's Fastest Growing Exercise Program

The Pilates Method

of Body Conditioning

Sean P. Gallagher &
Romana Kryzanowska

READ ALL ABOUT IT:

The Pilates Method of Body Conditioning

This book, written by Sean P. Gallagher, physical therapist at the Performing Arts Therapy Center in New York City, and Romana Kryzanowska, who ran the Pilates Studio under Joseph Pilates, is the perfect intro for beginners. The exercises lengthen and stretch your muscles while

strengthening major muscle groups (like the abdominals) and articulating proper alignment. Best of all, you can see the benefits of the body-lengthening exercises without the hassle and cost of a Pilates machine. **From Bainbridge Books, \$19.95**
—Jewel Elizabeth Partridge

DON'T JUST TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT:

MeJo Wiggin, a former dancer, became an adherent of Pilates after her dancing career was over. She noticed that it made her feel energized, stretched and gave her an overall sense of well-being. Shortly afterwards, Wiggin went through the stringent 600-plus hours of training to become a certified instructor. "Dancers have high body-awareness, allowing them to progress quickly into more advanced stages of the exercises," she says. Because dancers are used to training their minds and bodies, Pilates is a natural choice and dancers can see benefits very quickly. In fact, there are quite a few dancers among the 450 certified Pilates trainers worldwide.—Valerie Potsos