

What is pilates?

Pilates is a conditioning program that combines breathing, strengthening exercises and stretches to create a long strong muscles.

Where did it come from?

Pilates was created by a man called Joseph Pilates. Pilates has evolved over the past 80 years as more and more research is done into the body and how we move.

Why is pilates good for me as a dancer?

- Pilates develops long, strong muscles - perfect for a dancer. We need to have as much control as possible without bulk.
- Dancing is all about movement and having freedom of movement. By strengthening certain muscle groups, pilates allows the dancer to be more in control of his/her technique therefore allowing the dancer to move freely.
- It is also important to have a good line in dance - pilates focuses on elongating and lengthening muscles as it strengthens them.
- Pilates helps a dancer understand their own body which allows them to become more responsible for their own technique.
- Pilates warms up the body correctly for class
- Pilates can be used very successfully for rehabilitation from injury
- Pilates is a tool that can be used for life - to help keep the dance in condition during rest periods or simply to help keep your body in shape in a non-dancing career!

How often should I practice pilates?

It depends on a lot on other factors like your current work load, if you are injured etc. Ideally you will have a session one-on-one with an experienced instructor one a week and then practice during the week on your own; half an hour of concentrated work every second day will give you results.

What's with all the breathing?

Deep breathing is good for us in many ways; it 'wakes up' the spine and organs, it works the intercostal muscles at the back and sides of the rib cage, it connects your mind with your movement, and it is easier to hold your tummy in (navel to spine action) when you exhale!

What cant I lift my leg as high as Sylvie?

Our bodies are made differently - extremely differently. We can use pilates and body conditioning to help us get the best from our bodies, but we cant change bone, or the construction of our joints so there will always be some limitations. Our aim is to get our own body to the best possible position for a career in dance, or simply as a healthy, fit body for our future. .

Why do my hips hurt when I do pilates?

Pilates is about strengthening the muscles to allow freedom of movement in the joints - your hips shouldn't hurt. Make sure you are working in neutral pelvis, which means for most people there should be a small gap underneath you lower back when you lie down on you back with your knees bent. If you tuck you pelvis under in this position it causes tension in the front of the hips and thighs and results in a less effective contraction of the tummy muscles.

What is traditional pilates?

Traditional pilates is what Joseph Pilates taught. Traditional pilates instructors only teach these traditional exercises. Non traditional pilates instructors teach a combination of these traditional pilates exercises as well as variations and new exercises that have come about through research of the human body. Methods that are currently used alongside traditional pilates are yoga, Alexander technique, floor barre, Gyrokinesis, Franklin method and feldenkrais. Some non-traditional pilates instructors now call themselves 'body conditioners' rather than pilates instructors. Because they call on may different disciplines to produce their desired result.

How long does it take to benefit from pilates?

Pilates and body condition are wonderful because you can benefit from them on day 1, but as you continue to learn and practice you will deepen your understanding and therefore what you get out of your sessions. Pilates is a bit like an onion - you can keep peeling off layers and keep deepening your understanding of the exercises, your body and your technique. It is often said that after 10 sessions your body start to "get it".

What are some of the muscles we focus on in pilates and body conditioning?

The abdominals, transverse abdominis, rectus femoris, external and internal obliques (otherwise know as tummy muscles!)

Latissimus Dorsi (the large muscle on the back that helps keeps our shoulders down)

Adductors (inside thigh muscles)

Gastrocnemius (calf muscle)

Shoulder stabilizers (serratus anterior, triceps, biceps, deltoids)

Gluteals (butt muscles)

Hamstrings (back of leg)

What are the basic principles of pilates?

Relaxation

Alignment

Control

Precision

Routine

Breathing

Centering

Flowing movement

Recommended reading

Dance Technique and Injury Prevention by Justin Howse and Shirley Hancock

Inside Ballet Technique: Separating Anatomical Fact from Fiction in the Ballet Class
by Valerie Grieg

Dynamic Alignment Through Imagery by Eric Franklin

Pilates for Young Dancers DVD by Monique Richards!

<http://moniquerichardspilates.com>