

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Robert Brounstein

Week of March 3, 2019 – Pilates

Back in the 1970's, Jazzercise was the popular fitness craze. Then came Ti Bow – basically jazzercise with boxing moves. And how about Richard Simmons' "Sweatin' to the Oldies?" And of course, all those machines like Thigh Master and the Shake Weight. And today we have the popular Peloton and Bowflex machines. The list truly goes on and on. And today, many of us are taking a look at something called Pilates. Now, understand, I'm not promoting any particular product or endorsing a specific exercise regimen. I think it's great to see many of us taking the initiative to improve ourselves. And it seems that Pilates has really been steadily growing in popularity. Yet, while it is rapidly becoming a household word, many do not know where and when this latest trend in fitness originated.

That fact is, Pilates has been around a long time; even before Jack LaLanne first appeared on our black and white television screens. The name, Pilates actually comes from its originator, Joseph Pilates. He was born near Düsseldorf, Germany in 1883. Unhealthy as a child (stories suggest that he suffered from asthma, rickets and rheumatic fever), he studied many kinds of self-improvement systems. He drew from Eastern practices and Zen Buddhism while inspired by the ancient Greek ideal of man perfected in the development of body, mind, and spirit. His drive and determination to overcome his childhood ailments led him to become a competent gymnast, diver and skier. In 1912, he lived in England working as a circus performer, boxer and self-defense instructor. During the First World War, he was interned (along with other German nationals) where he further developed his technique of physical fitness as he provided instructions to his fellow internees. During the latter part of the War, he served as an orderly in a hospital on the Isle of Man where he worked with patients unable to walk. He attached bed springs to the hospital beds to help support the patients' limbs, leading to the development of his famous piece of equipment known as the 'Cadillac'. Much of his equipment, although slightly adapted, is still in use today in many Pilates Studios.

Pilates emigrated to the USA in the early 1920s with his wife Clara, and together they developed and taught the method in their 'body-conditioning gym' in New York in 1926.

Today, Pilates is practiced worldwide and is defined as a form of low-impact exercise that aims to strengthen muscles while improving postural alignment and flexibility. Pilates moves tend to target the core, although the exercises work other areas of your body as well. A typical Pilates workout is 45 minutes to an hour long.

Joseph Pilates has termed his method as the art of controlled movements. When practiced on a consistent basis, it is designed to increase flexibility while building strength and developing control and endurance within the entire body. It puts emphasis on alignment, breathing, developing a strong core, and improving coordination and balance. The core, consisting of the muscles of the abdomen, low back, and hips, is often called the "powerhouse" and is thought to be the key to a person's stability. There are different exercises that range in difficulty from beginner to advanced (and even beyond). As with most exercise programs, intensity can be increased over time as the body adapts itself to the exercises.



TerranearPMC Safety Share

Joe Pilates based his work on three principles: Breath, whole-body health and whole-body commitment; with the whole-body encompassing mind, body and spirit. This concept grew and now includes the principles of:

Breath, Concentration, Centering, Control, Precision and Flow

Breathing increases the intake of oxygen and the circulation of oxygenated blood to every part of the body and is viewed as cleansing and invigorating. Pilates breathing is described as a posterior lateral breathing, meaning that the practitioner is instructed to breathe deep into the back and sides of his or her rib cage. When practitioners exhale, they are instructed to note the engagement of their deep abdominal and pelvic floor muscles and maintain this engagement as they inhale. Pilates attempts to properly coordinate this breathing practice with movement.

The way that exercises are performed are more important than the actual exercises themselves. Similar to the Chinese form of Tai Chi, all exercises are performed with control. Muscles work to lift against gravity along with the aid of the resistance of springs; thereby controlling the movement of the body and the apparatus.

All movement begins from the center and moves outward to the limbs. The exercise regimen strives for an economy of movement, therefore focusing on the precision of each motion. And by focusing on the actual motion of each motion along with correct posture, exercises ensure personal safety (i.e. reduces body strains and sprains) by balancing the demand on muscles and optimizing coordination.

Any personal trainer would tell you, performing an exercise with precision is essential as opposed to halfhearted attempts; thus, one gains more from a few energetic efforts than from many listless ones. The ultimate goal is for precision to become second nature and carry over into everyday life as refinement and economy of movement.

A search on the internet for Pilates equipment shows apparatuses that one may define as stark or simple. Quite frankly, upon first glance, one could believe that such items could be found at an Ikea store. There is very little embellishment with minimal attachments or embellished components; thus, suggesting that the equipment is not designed to assist the person, but rather, demand that the intended exercise is an effort that requires 100% of the person.

Although Pilates has been an exercise discipline for ninety years there is little empirical research to definitively support the claims of its effectiveness. However, based on subject matter expertise within the physical therapy community, there is cautious support for Pilates to improve flexibility, abdominal and lumbo-pelvic stability and muscular activity. In addition, the theories that explain how Pilates can be effective appear to be well established. Nevertheless, fitness professionals have suggested that greater documentation is needed to determine the true effectiveness of this exercise discipline.

So far, Pilates is not professionally regulated which that means that anybody who wants to claim to be a Pilates instructor, can do so. And back in October 2000 "Pilates" was ruled a generic term by a U.S. federal court, making it free for unrestricted use.

Everyone is the architect of their own happiness-Joseph Pilates