

Get Active Stay Active.

What is so special about Pilates?

- *Karen*
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In the fitness and rehabilitation world, there is a new buzz word sweeping the nation and that word is Pilates. You cannot help but turn on the television or open a newspaper and see a celebrity giving their testimonial as to how Pilates has helped tone their physiques or hear how the Detroit Lions and other professional sports teams are incorporating this method of exercise into their conditioning regimes.

Truth be told, there is nothing new about Pilates. It started during World War I, when a German boxer and performer by the name of Joseph Hubertus Pilates was given a job as a caregiver to the ill and disabled. Pilates felt strongly that everyone should exercise, even those individuals who could not get out of bed. He began to attach springs to the metal bed frames of his patients. Through these springs, he could either add resistance or assistance depending on the individual's need.

Pilates's idea of exercise involves equal parts of stretching and strengthening, coupled with focused breathing patterns. Pilates had a personal interest in ancient Greek and Roman exercise regimes as well as interest in yoga and Zen meditation. These factors all clearly influenced his views on exercise.

After World War II, Pilates moved to New York City and opened his exercise studio. Soon private individuals and professional dancers began to flock to his business. The dance community appreciated Pilates's view of developing a balanced body without unnecessary muscle bulk. Pilates continued to tweak his exercises to conform to what dancers needed. Thereby he put the most indelible mark on his exercise method. The pairing between Pilates and the dance community continued for many years. It is just recently that the general public is becoming aware of the profound results that can be had from regular exercise in the Pilates method.

Practiced faithfully, Pilates yields numerous benefits. Increased lung capacity and circulation through deep, healthy breathing is a primary focus. Strength and flexibility, particularly of the abdomen and back muscles, coordination-both muscular and mental, are key components in an effective Pilates program. Posture, balance, and core strength are all heartily increased. Bone density and joint health improve, and many experience positive body awareness for the first time.

Pilates is a very focused body work. Most people will need guidance in order to perform these exercises correctly and safely. If interested in starting an exercise program in Pilates, it would be a good idea to seek out professionals who have had extensive training in Pilates. This will help you develop the body awareness necessary to perform the exercise.

Please submit any questions you may have for our sports medicine experts by e-mailing cangelel@dmc.org. In the subject line, please write, "Get Active, Stay Active." We will respond to all the questions we receive and select one each month to feature in our column.

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