



PILATES

Getting to the Core

By Patty Kovacevich

Created in the 1890's by the legendary physical trainer Joseph H. Pilates, the Pilates method is a systematic series of exercises that can bring a balance of strength and flexibility to your body, mind, and spirit.

Born near Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1880, Joseph Hubertus Pilates started out in life as a small, frail child, enduring life-threatening afflictions such as asthma, rickets, and rheumatic fever. He suffered greatly as a young patient spending much of his early boyhood in an iron lung and other immobilizing methods of medical rehabilitation that were used at the time. As a young adolescent he made a life-changing decision to try a number of exercise methods to strengthen his body and restore his health. Studying a combination of Eastern disciplines such as ancient Zen yoga, martial arts, the highly refined discipline of Chinese circus performers, with Western forms of physical activities such as bodybuilding, gymnastics, boxing, and skiing. Joe was greatly inspired by the ancient Greeks and first Olympiads. By the young age of fourteen he had immeasurably improved his own health and sculpted his physique so remarkably that he was posing for anatomical charts. His life became an obsession for attainment of optimal health and the perfect body. Along the way was born the series of movements that he referred to as "Contrology" and his pupils referred to his guiding hand as "Pilates".

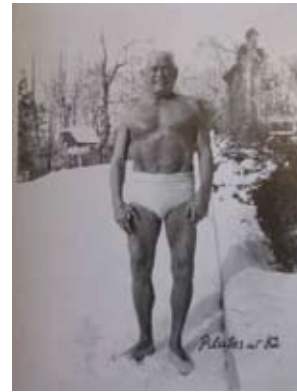


"When I am dead, they will say, 'Pilates was right.' I am 50 years ahead of my time," he proclaimed in the 1920's. Joe Pilates lived to be a robust 87 year-old icon. Had he not succumbed to the devastating effects of smoke inhalation resulting from a fire in the restaurant below his studio in Manhattan, he might have demonstrated an incredible level of physical fitness for many more years. His lifelong, devoted search for his own health and self-improvement, and later his search to help many others, ultimately became his timeless gift to the world.

In 1912, he traveled to England to become a boxer, but when World War I broke out, Pilates was interned with other German nationals. While being held in a camp in Lancaster, England, he taught fellow camp members the concepts and exercises he developed over his 20-year self-study. It was at this time that he developed a series of movements done on the floor which is today is known as "Mat Work". A few years later he was transferred to another camp where he was designated a caretaker or 'nurse' of the many internees struck with disease and wartime physical injury. He resourcefully devised equipment to help heal and rehabilitate his 'patients' by taking bedsprings and rigging them to create spring resistance and a 'movement' apparatus for the ill and bedridden. This was the genesis of today's sophisticated Pilates "Reformer" and other equipment. A huge component of the patients' ability to get well, even to survive, was both a healthy, natural circulation of the body and a reawakening of dormant brain cells. These factors remain healing principles upon which the Pilates method thrives today.

Later on in 1926, Joe Pilates and his wife opened their first studio in New York City where his reputation for producing remarkable physical improvements first spread among prizefighters and boxers. The editor of The Ring Magazine acknowledged "Professor Pilates" work and considered him to be "the world's greatest teacher of physical education and correct exercises" of the time. Years later, he began to attract the world of dance; eminent masters such as Martha Graham, Ruth St. Denis, Jerome Robbins, and George Balanchine who became devotees of the Pilates Method.

The Pilates movements, fluid in nature and designed to lengthen the muscles, have a somewhat ballet-like appearance to them. Pilates creates balance within the body which greatly improves posture and joint mobility and creates lean muscle, regardless of one's size or shape. Classes exist today to bring hope and improved health to people with all sorts of disabilities and physical maladies such as arthritis, weight or body strength issues, pregnancy, or just to help individuals quickly attain a stronger body. It appeals to a wide range of people to improve the body's natural functioning as well as boost confidence and mental wellness or aid in the fatigue and stress of restless sleep. Enthusiasm for the Pilates method has spread to all areas such as athletics, modeling, acting, and the general world of physical fitness.



Core principles of concentration, centering, breathing, control, as well as movement fluidity ensure the fullest possible benefits from the precision exercises and, with time become integral to one's everyday movement, posture, and overall sense of well-being.

One of the most respected Pilates Instructors in the United States resides right here in San Diego. Moses Urbano owns and operates a private practice called StudioMo, comprised solely of one-on-one private sessions. Formerly a sales and marketing executive, Urbano was considering a new profession, when in December, 1997, he read a fascinating article about a life-changing, 'hot, new' exercise program called Pilates and decided he had to try it. One month later he was on a jet plane to New York City to experience a Pilates workout session. There were very few studios in the country at that time and Urbano was determined to learn from the best. At the time, ground zero for Pilates Instruction was Drago's Gym in New York and it was there that Romana Kryzanowska, one of Joe's earliest protégés, was keeping his work alive. Immediately following that first class under Romana's supervision, he knew he had to study this amazing method of exercise. "I had no idea of what I had just done, but I felt as if I could stop a MackTruck." This profound experience in January, 1998, inspired Urbano to make Pilates his profession and the core of his life. Today he is considered by his colleagues and students to be one of the most esteemed Pilates professionals in the world. Urbano works with renowned Romana's Pilates Instructors who teach the undiluted core principles devised by Joseph Pilates.





“That first session I experienced in New York was a total body exercise, something completely different and utterly amazing to me. I had never experienced anything like it. I came back home to San Diego and began studying with some of the finest instructors in Los Angeles, all trained by the famed Romana Kryzanowska. Today, she heads an International Certification Program and I am one of the few Instructor-Trainers in the world for Romana’s Pilates.”

According to Urbano, the Pilates Method is an excellent way to strengthen the body through concentrated movements that will make anyone “better at the game of life”. Urbano’s oldest student is 93; his youngest, 17. He says experience is the crucial factor in searching for the right Pilates instructor. With so many people being commercially certified all too quickly these days, one must be very selective in choosing a teacher of Pilates. Urbano calls it “a true art form that happens to be a great way to exercise.”



“People think Pilates is all about stretching and elongating but it’s much more than that. It’s also about strengthening the body. It is a brilliant way to isolate the muscles and strengthen them without impact on the joints. Resistance from the springs works with the weight of the body to strengthen the muscles. Ultimately breath becomes an important part of the exercises, for proper breathing is essential to life itself. Our gut, our core, our “POWERHOUSE” as Joe Pilates referred to the muscles of the abdomen, lower back, and buttocks, is our command center, our intuition. It’s also the center for precise balance, proper digestion and circulation, as well as the source for extension and flexion of the spine,” says Urbano.

Practice does make perfect. According to Urbano as one becomes more proficient at the exercises, one does them with more precision, and the depth of breath becomes greater than that of a marathon runner without the stress on the body. Cardio strength becomes but one of the many bodily improvements.

“Honor what your body desires and requires for healing and becoming stronger. Listen to what your body responds to well and do that,” Urbano encourages. “There is no cookie-cutter method. Pilates is always appropriately customized to the individual and no two individuals are ever alike.”

Sharp, jerky movements or static, isolated motions are not part of the Pilates method. Urbano likes to go back to the mantra which summarizes Joe Pilates work: “It is the spirit that builds the body.” Learning and utilizing the fluid and synchronistic movements of Pilates will insure the fullest possible benefits from the exercises and over time a new awareness of these fluid movements become second nature. “The genius of Pilates is in the work: My clients and students are living proof.”

Reading “*The Pilates Method of Physical and Mental Conditioning*”
by Philip Friedman and Gail Eisen” originally published Doubleday 1980
www.thepilatesbook.com

San Diego area Instructors
www.studiomopilates.com

Romana’s Pilates Instructors
www.romanaspilates.com

Photography by Jon Mckee Photography - Los Angeles
www.jonmckeephotography.com

Photos Courtesy of Darien Gold - Owner / Certified Pilates Instructor, Studio Darien in Hollywood
www.studiodarien.com

Postures guided by Master Pilates Teacher, Jay Grimes

These exercises should not be attempted without the supervision of an experienced Pilates Instructor