

The power of *Pilates*

by kendra jordan

The popularity of Pilates is ever increasing in gyms and general fitness facilities. However, many people think the exercise regimen only includes a mat and a few small accessories, which can lead them to believe that it is not much different than yoga. However, Pilates is a one-of-a-kind, invigorating form of exercise involving unique, effective equipment and differs greatly from yoga.

The classical Pilates equipment was developed almost a century ago by Joseph Pilates in order to add more challenge and variety to the mat exercises.

Pilates began attaching springs to army cots, hospital beds and window frames during World War I to help improve the strength of injured soldiers.

After moving to the United States in 1926, he streamlined

these designs to create exercise equipment. Traditional Pilates matwork is comprised of only 34 different exercises, whereas there are over 500 exercises that can be completed on all of the Pilates equipment.

The equipment not only adds more challenge and interest to Pilates, but also allows muscle and postural imbalances to become more apparent and easier to correct. Springs are used as resistance tools rather than free weights or plates in addition to the student's body weight.

Every movement is based on working from a strong center, or "powerhouse," as the core is referred to in Pilates. Along with a strong powerhouse, Pilates focuses on the quality of movement versus completing mindless repetitions. With every exercise, the goal is to focus on the six Pilates principles: concentration, centering, control, flow of movement, precision and breath.

Focusing on these six principles, along with the movements alone, provide for an

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eye-opening and different approach to health and fitness. Even the most advanced student can be challenged by a basic Pilates session if the six principles are applied. For instance, each movement must be controlled with precision, the body should be centered on the mat or equipment, and the mind must be centered to concentrate on each exercise. The goal is to get each movement to flow from one to the next and to use the breath to support each movement. Pilates teaches the body to not only move, but to move mindfully and with purpose and strength.

Many people also think that you must already be extremely flexible and in great shape to do Pilates. However, the goal is not to become as flexible as possible, but rather to develop a body equal in strength and flexibility. To be too flexible is not always beneficial for the joints, as ligaments and tendons are designed to support and stabilize joints. When a body is overly flexible, joints can lose some of their support, leading to injury over time.

Instead, Pilates works to increase flexibility where needed and increase strength and stamina where it is lacking. Many Pilates enthusiasts claim that after just a handful of sessions, back aches and neck pain disappear, they stand taller, their posture improves and their general body awareness is heightened.

Pilates is not only a form of exercise, but also a lifestyle. All too often we become wrapped up in trying to emulate models or movie stars. Joseph Pilates claimed that “after 10 sessions, you will feel a difference; after 20 sessions, you will see a difference; and after 30 sessions, you will have a whole new body.”

Though this statement is true, every body will develop and change differently. One person’s goal may not be another’s. Every body can completely change in terms of composition, strength, posture, the reduction of chronic pain or the ability to move in a way not possible before. It all depends on the individual’s dedication and initial starting point. With consistent practice, anyone of any ability level can improve their health and fitness through Pilates.

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