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Pilates

Pilates (pronounced Pee-lah-teas) exercises have been around for many years but suddenly there has been an explosion in popularity and the number of classes being offered. The medical world is now realising the benefits of the Pilates method for prevention and rehabilitation of amongst other things back and sacroiliac pain. As a physio I first got excited about Pilates when I did a short weekend course which was intended for physios who wanted to teach their patients Pilates exercises. I really enjoyed the class that the instructor did for us (I never liked other exercise classes much, too much getting out of breath etc) and had some excellent results with my patients, then mostly tough army guys and girls. I then decided to take a full Pilates instructors course which lasted 6 months altogether with personal study, case studies, periods of intense tuition and written and practical exams at the end. This course was only for Physios and experienced fitness instructors so was shorter than some other courses but did allow for the knowledge of anatomy and exercise that we already had. I am shortly going to do further courses in Pilates on the exercise ball and Pilates with theraband. After completing the course I decided to run a couple of classes in the week as well as use Pilates therapeutically. The classes have now grown to eight a week!

Joseph Pilates was born in 1880 and spent his childhood fighting rickets, asthma and rheumatic fever. He lived in pursuit of optimal health and fitness: by fifteen he was posing for anatomy posters. He moved to England to train as a boxer, circus performer and self defence instructor. In the First World War he was interned as a Prisoner of war because he was a German national. He worked in the hospital and soon devised a series of exercises for his patients using bed springs amongst other equipment to help rehabilitate people. In 1926 he left for New York where he opened the first Pilates studio where he attracted dancers and athletes. Pilates exercises complemented their traditional exercises to balance the body and correct posture.

Pilates is the most functionally focussed training method I have experienced and has to be tried to be appreciated. If you have seen a class in progress it may look lethargic, slow and very easy but as you begin to understand how it works you may adopt a new attitude to exercise. The exercises are a balanced blend of strengthening and flexibility. Pilates re-trains the mind and body with correct muscle recruitment patterns so that the way we exercise and move every day is improved. Pilates is a mind (you have to concentrate) - body conditioning exercise programme that targets the deep postural muscles of the abdomen, spine and pelvis to improve core stability and posture. The exercises are done with control not struggle so you should feel toned, relaxed and not exhausted at the end of a session. A strong core is essential for maintaining correct posture and allowing good control and balance in the rest of the body. The classical exercises have been adapted over the years as we start to see different abnormal movement patterns related to change in lifestyle e.g. postural problems from sitting at the computer all day.

Pilates classes

The recent interest in Pilates has meant that there are now more classes available. Most classes take the form of mat work but there are studios where you can work on some of the other types of equipment. Before beginning a class you should ensure that your instructor is qualified. Ask to see their certificate and enquire about the length of training (it should be more than a weekend). Prepare to fill in a simple medical screening form before the class and ensure that the instructor knows about any problems you may have. A good instructor will know how to tailor a programme to your needs and monitor movements to ensure good form. Many instructors insist on a 1:1 session before you join a class although the cost of this can put people off. The alternative is to try and find a class where the entire class are beginners starting the same day as you. Classes should be limited in numbers to around twelve to fifteen so that the instructor can get around and correct if necessary.

If you are joining for medical reasons I would strongly recommend a private session first. It is vital to get the hang of contracting the transversus muscle: this is the whole key to effective Pilates! If you are unsure if you have got the muscle working, ask the instructor to check. He or she should be able to feel the muscle contracting in your lower tummy (it is in there somewhere). You should feel able in the class to ask the instructor to clarify an exercise or demonstrate it to you. Remember it is your class.

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Classes are generally run as a course of six to ten weeks. This is so that the exercises can be safely progressed and the instructor does not have new people joining each week, trying to explain the basic moves to them while providing effective exercise to the rest of the class.

Pilates is helpful before, during and after pregnancy as you develop postural awareness and those key core muscles that will support you and your baby during pregnancy and afterwards will help regain control of the pelvic floor, tone the deep abdominals and improve posture as well as hopefully allowing a little time out. You should always seek medical advice before commencing new exercise programme.

Most classes are friendly, non-threatening and non-competitive. It does not matter how old, young, fat or thin or out of condition you are, there is always a nice mixture. People come for all sorts of different reasons. Most of the time you are lying on the mat so are unaware of the person next to you, you have time to focus on yourself.

The Technical bit

We know that spinal stability is dependant on three subsystems: the neural control subsystem, the passive subsystem, (ligaments, bones etc) and the active subsystem of muscles. In SPD it is often the passive subsystem that starts the problems, but there are many other factors that lead to lumbar spine and sacroiliac dysfunction. Research has shown that after one episode of back pain there is a delay in the onset of contraction of the transversus abdominus (Hodges and Richardson 1996), altered positional awareness of the lumbar spine (Miller and Mederios) and reduced stabilisation or stiffening of lumbar motion segments (Hodges and Richardson 1997).

Low back pain can result from poor control of a spinal segment so abnormally large movements of that segment produce stretch or compression on pain sensitive structures i.e. ligaments, nerves etc. It would seem reasonable to assume that this could also apply to the sacro-iliac joint.

The key muscles engaged in every Pilates exercise are the transversus abdominus and pelvic floor.

We know that irrespective of cause, transversus function is poor in people with low back pain; there is a delay in onset of contraction prior to limb movement. Transversus contraction leads to stimulation of the deep back muscles via tensioning the posterior layer of thoraco lumbar fascia. This and the deep back muscles blend with the ligaments that support the sacro iliac joint. A strong pelvic floor also enhances core stability.

In a nutshell, Pilates exercises done correctly can help re-educate the transversus and pelvic floor, thus increasing core stability, and help reduce back, sacro-iliac and pelvic pain and the likelihood of its return.

At the moment I see patients at my home or theirs and run classes in Didcot, Blewbury and Aston Upthorpe but hopefully will be joining a practice/gym in Didcot after Christmas. I can be contacted on 01235 850300 or rachel.marffy@btconnect.com

Reputable training courses include:

Body Control
Australian physiotherapy and Pilates institute
Michael King

Modern Pilates
Pilates Foundation
Stott Pilates

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- Website: www.pelvicpartnership.org.uk
 - General enquiries: enquiries@pelvicpartnership.org.uk
 - Support for SPD: support@pelvicpartnership.org.uk
 - Membership: membership@pelvicpartnership.org.uk
 - Call The Pelvic Partnership on: 01235 820 921
 - If you are enquiring from Ireland: 028 4063 8116

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Advert

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pilates and more...

We are a well-established, friendly, fully equipped, pilates studio in the centre of Wallingford, offering exercise tuition through **specialised mat classes** and a **bespoke equipment studio**.

what is pilates?

Exercises teaching how to isolate specific muscles or groups of muscles to improve core strength, body tone, posture and flexibility, using either specially designed equipment in the studio or in group mat classes.

who is it for?

Everyone. Men and women of all ages and abilities. Those requiring rehabilitation work, recovering from sports injury or simply as part of a general regime to improve and maintain overall health and fitness. Women with SPD have benefited from Pilates as it helps them regain their core strength which keeps their pelvis in place (*we recommend that you are signed off from your physio/practioner before joining one of our classes*).

please contact us or simply call in:

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