

## What to Expect in Your Pilates Lesson

For your first lesson only, please allow five or 10 minutes extra time to fill out the short intake form we require before starting an exercise program at Healing Motion Physical Therapy and Wellness Center. This information helps your instructor understand what you conditions you may have that will affect your ability to exercise and your general health status.

There are private changing rooms at Healing Motion, so you don't need to wear your exercise clothes to and from the studio (especially in the winter.) We do request that you remove your shoes in the front waiting room as we generally don't wear street shoes in the clinic or gym areas, and all exercises are done barefoot, or in special toe socks if you prefer. We recommend you wear loose, comfortable exercise pants (or shorts) and top that allow maximum freedom of movement.



In the first lesson or two, you will be getting to know your instructor and they will be getting to know you, so your workout will most likely be on the conservative side. But have no fear, the Pilates Method under the tutelage of the experienced instructors at Healing Motion is extremely adaptable and can be as gentle or demanding as your individual goals require. When your instructor gets to know you, your personality as well as your abilities, capabilities and potential deficits, you will find your workout becoming progressively more and more challenging.

Most clients report feeling invigorated with renewed energy after sessions at Healing Motion. Our instructors will also give you “homework” that you can do on the days you don't come for a lesson. Initially, these will most likely be some key stretches your instructor feels would benefit you the most, but eventually could be a full-blown mat workout. What a treat! You will be learning a workout that goes with you anywhere—vacation, business travel or visiting friends and family out of town. You can stay in shape and continue to enjoy the full benefits of the Pilates Method anywhere you happen to be.

**I noticed you don't offer large group classes like the health clubs, why should I take a private session?**

Pilates is not like other forms of exercise and we believe you will get the maximum benefit for your time invested from private or semi-private lessons. Pilates differs from other ways of working out especially in its demands on the abdominals. Even those who are fit are often surprised at the initial effort it takes to correctly perform Pilates moves. Results are dependent on your ability to efficiently recruit certain muscle groups with great precision, and intentionally coordinate the entire body in each exercise. Teaching this requires a highly trained instructor, and is best done one-on-one.

While the instructor in a group class should make every effort to provide individual attention to each class participant, privates or duets afford our instructors the chance to focus specifically on your unique strengths and weaknesses to better maximize your potential. Under the watchful eye of our expert instructors, you will make quicker progress with private or duet lessons. Additionally, if you are starting with an active injury or health condition that impacts your ability to exercise, it's even more important to take private lessons so that your workout can be individually tailored to meet your specific needs.

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**My health club only offers Pilates mat classes, what is the difference between mat class and equipment?**

Mat work is the non-equipment component in the Pilates methodology. It's a little ironic that many people are first introduced to Pilates through large, impersonal mat classes, as the mat



work (at an intermediate or advanced level) is the hardest part of the whole system. Pilates first developed the mat work, and later saw a need to invent some of his equipment to help his clients get strong enough to do a full-blown mat workout. Depending on the exercise and how it's taught, the springs and straps on the equipment can be assistance or resistance, which is not intuitively obvious at first (yet another reason to work with a comprehensively trained instructor.) TIn some exercises the springs and straps help support and/or lift you against gravity in a more supportive environment than on the mat, where it is literally, only you and gravity. In others, the springs act as resistance making the exercise harder as more springs are added.

Additionally, because of the unique design of Pilates equipment, the challenge can be as great or as small as needed, and given the large number of exercises available, it is unlikely you will become bored as often happens with more traditional exercise and exercise equipment. Healing Motion's certified teachers understand how to modify these factors providing you with the best workout for your fitness level.

**Okay, I think I understand that, but how is Pilates really different from other forms of exercise? Don't they all do pretty much the same thing?**

It is true that the generalized benefits of exercise (improving overall health and preventing disease) apply to all forms of exercise across the spectrum of possibilities. However, Pilates is different from most other forms of exercise because it's non-impact and safe, and emphasizes three guiding principles: whole body health, whole body commitment and breath. Pilates further outlined six movement principles present in the successful execution of ALL Pilates exercises: concentration, control, centering, rhythm, precision, and breathing. In Pilates own words:

Contrology is complete coordination of body, mind and spirit. Through Contrology you first purposefully acquire complete control of your own body and then through proper repetition of its exercises you gradually and progressively acquire that natural rhythm and coordination associated with all your mental and subconscious activities. (Pilates 1945)

In short, the Pilates method is a physical movement program designed to stretch, strengthen, and balance the whole body. Pilates exercises focus on postural symmetry, breath control, abdominal strength, spine, pelvis and shoulder stabilization, muscular flexibility, joint mobility and strengthening through the complete range of motion of all joints. Instead of isolating muscle groups, the whole body is trained, integrating the upper and lower extremities with the trunk.

No other exercise system aspires to or is able to accomplish these goals so efficiently as Pilates.

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**You said Pilates is based on six movement principles. What are they?**

The most important principle is concentration. You need to concentrate on using the whole body in each of the exercises. Second is control. Every movement is to be done with control. When you are out of control, you are most likely to be injured. Third is centering, so that all movement arises from your center which is quite stable. When you really get this principle integrated in your body and movement, everything you do becomes easier and much more efficient. The rhythm or fluidity of each exercise is fourth. There is a natural rhythm and flow to each exercise and eventually, to the workout as a whole. It should look something like a dance where every movement flows into the next. Precision is fifth.



You try to perform each movement as precisely as possible, so that you practice efficient movement patterns. It really becomes a form of neuromuscular reprogramming in which you are fine tuning the motor programs your nervous system uses to accomplish any complex activity. Last, but certainly not least, breath and it's active integration with your movement is extremely important to the proper execution of Pilates exercises. You should not hold your breath at all, and many exercises are taught with a very specific breathing pattern which best supports the intent of the exercise. However, at an advanced level a Pilates practitioner can breath in any way that supports the movement. All of this work should provide one with more movement choices not less. Once again, the six basic movement principles are: concentration, control, centering, rhythm/fluidity, precision and breath.

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**Wow, that's intense. Can Pilates benefit anyone?**

In a general sense, yes Pilates can benefit anyone, when taught by a knowledgeable, comprehensively trained instructor. With the right instructor, literally anyone can do **some** part of the Pilates system, from the most basic fundamentals to the most challenging, dangerous (yes there are some potentially dangerous, but fun, Pilates exercises) movements.

Perhaps the only people that do not need Pilates are preadolescent children, partly because they are too small for the equipment, but mainly because they still move so naturally and efficiently. Watch a child at play, they center when it's needed and don't bother otherwise. There is a rhythm and fluidity, a precision and control, an ability to concentrate so fully in the moment it's as if the rest of the world ceases to exist, and in the next breath they are off to the whatever else captures their imagination. In their natural, normal play, they embody all that Pilates tried to incorporate into his method.

In a more practical day-to-day sense, no, not everyone will benefit from Pilates. I have worked with some folks in my more than 25 years of teaching that just did not like Pilates because of a myriad of personal factors including personality, temperament or it was just too different from what they were used to in exercise.

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**What are the benefits of Pilates?**

With regular, committed Pilates workouts you can expect to:

- o Improve strength, flexibility and balance.



- o Tone and build long, lean muscles without bulk.
  - o Challenge deep abdominal muscles that support your core.
  - o Engage your mind and enhance body awareness.
  - o Condition efficient patterns of movement making your body less prone to injury.
  - o Reduce stress, relieve tension, boost energy through efficient exercise and deep stretching.
  - o Restore postural alignment to a more balanced, neutral state.
  - o Create a stronger, more flexible spine.
  - o Promote recovery from strain or injury.
  - o Increase joint range of motion.
  - o Improve circulation.
  - o Heighten neuromuscular coordination.
  - o Help relieve back pain and other joint stress.
  - o Correct over-training of muscle groups which can lead to stress and injury.
  - o Enhance mobility, agility and stamina.
  - o Compliments sports training and develops functional fitness for activities of daily living.
  - o Improve the way your body looks and feels.
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**That's great! What should I look for in a Pilates instructor?**

Because Pilates is so popular right now there are a lot of different organizations claiming to offer certification using the movements of Joseph Pilates. In fact, there is nothing to stop literally anyone, even with no training whatsoever, from claiming to teach Pilates. Only a little better than no training at all, are what we call "weekend wonders." These are folks, often fitness instructors of other forms of exercise, that take a single weekend workshop with the expectation that they will then know all about Pilates and be 'certified' to teach it. While they may be very knowledgeable in other systems of exercise, Pilates is unique enough that a single workshop is woefully insufficient to train anyone in the entire methodology, even highly trained professionals like physical therapists.

Unfortunately you need to be an informed consumer in this day and become knowledgeable about their certification and education. A comprehensively trained instructor has successfully completed a course of study which includes all the equipment and mat exercises, and takes a minimum of 450 to 600 hours. The training should ideally include lecture, demonstration, observation of certified teachers, student teaching experience, and practical and written exams. Definitely ask questions, lots of questions. If they have passed the Pilates Method Alliance's ([www.pilatesmethodalliance.org](http://www.pilatesmethodalliance.org)) national certification exam for Pilates instructors, you can feel reasonably confident that you are dealing with an adequately trained individual. If you find someone getting very defensive about giving you details regarding their training, run as fast as possible the other way. They almost certainly are not comprehensively trained. If you have medical issues, it is imperative that they have been trained and have experience working with people that have issues similar to yours.

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**How often can I do Pilates? Is it like weight training in that you need to rest your muscles for 48 hours between workouts?**



Especially at the beginning, Pilates is safe enough to do every day. Initially you may want to do it every day for better retention of what you learned in your lesson and become consistent in your practice. At the beginning the intensity is more in figuring out how to integrate your center, while learning the exercises and specific coordinations and less about increasing muscle strength and power. As you progress and are able to tolerate a much more muscularly intensive workout, then we have to start taking into consideration the overload principle of increasing muscle strength and periodization of specific exercises. Joseph Pilates used to recommend doing it three times a week. We have found two to three lessons per week seems to be a good balance in modern life.

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**Will my body be sore after a Pilates class?**

Feeling sore is a very individual thing. Some people don't feel sore. Pilates is what you put into it. If you're really conscientious and make an effort to make every movement count, you'll most likely feel something the following day. It also has to do with your athleticism. If you've been sedentary, you're probably going to feel it more than someone who's very active. It's all relative.

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**How can beginners get the most benefit from Pilates?**

Be consistent, especially in the beginning. Don't just try it once. Give yourself at least five lessons (ten would be better) to get a feel for what Pilates can do for you. Make it your reward, your break from a hectic day. Pilates is the perfect antidote to the many deleterious effects of modern culture and life. Also, listen to your body and really concentrate—it makes for a better workout. Someone once told me that you need to "arrive," meaning you have to be there mentally as well as physically. To get the most out of Pilates, you have to be very present. Your body and mind will thank you.

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**Why does my instructor stop me after only about 5 repetitions?**

Many people are surprised by the small number of repetitions of each exercise that the Pilates Method calls for. They think it is just a beginner thing, but it's not. Fewer repetitions are actually an important part of the overall body/mind approach to exercise that the Pilates method promotes.

Most Pilates exercise instructions call for 3 to 6 repetitions of an exercise and that's it. There are only a limited number of exercises in which you do 10 or 15 repetitions. Why? The reason is that the Pilates method is based on the idea that you bring your entire being to each exercise and in so doing, get the maximum benefit out of every move you make. If you do an exercise with the full intention of working the Pilates movement principles outlined above, you will not need to do many repetitions of each exercise. Also, Pilates is about using the body as a highly functional, integrated whole, not about over-developing any one set of muscles as you can do with too many repetitions of an exercise. Rather than doing a lot of repetitions, the Pilates method moves through many exercises in a session, taking advantage of variety to keep the body/mind



engaged, develop a symmetrical, graceful musculature, and constantly forcing the neuromuscular system to adapt to new challenges by repeatedly changing the body's orientation to gravity or the direction and intensity of the working resistance.

The Pilates method is not about exercising less—you still develop strong muscles, both in the core and limbs. As anyone who has gone through the classic mat work out can tell you, this is real exercise, but the Pilates Method avoids the pitfalls of doing endless repetition in

Pilates FAQ's

favor of balanced, efficient, full body movement.

Joseph Pilates was adamant on the subject of not doing too many repetitions of any exercise:

...be sure to NEVER REPEAT THE SELECTED EXERCISE(S) MORE THAN THE PRESCRIBED NUMBER OF TIMES since more harm will result than good by your unwittingly or intentionally disregarding this most important advice and direction. Contrology [Pilates] is not a fatiguing system of dull, boring, abhorred exercises repeated daily "ad-nauseam." (Pilates 1945)

Just imagine, with each exercise you are fully present, impeccably aligned, and moving with full and open flow of breath and motion. With these elements working for you, your body and mind work together to create a body wisdom and balance that surpass the limited results of mindless repetitions.

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#### **How does Pilates compare to yoga?**

Pilates and yoga are great complements to one another. They both focus on similar goals such as general flexibility, strength, and posture yet differ in their technique of achieving these goals. Neither approach is superior to the other, but the "right" exercises for you depends on personal influences and how you habitually move and inhabit your body. Pilates focuses directly and specifically on abdominal and gluteal awareness and contraction, while yoga has less specific emphasis on this. Yoga tends to work in a position and then perfect and tweak that position while Pilates is more dynamic. You are always moving as you focus on integrating your core and breathing through movement. Obviously, there's a whole line of equipment in Pilates that doesn't exist in yoga, which provides a distinctly different movement experience. These are just a few of the general differences that we have noted between Pilates and yoga, but there is a mind-body connection and fluidity common to both. It is important to note again that we feel these two disciplines greatly enhance and compliment one another.

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