Pilates: Mind Over Muscle

Pilates classes can be conducted using mats on the floor or using the Reformer, a resistance machine developed by Joseph Pilates.

While the term Pilates seems to have worked itself into public consciousness as fluidly as the movements for which it is known, it is hardly just another fitness trend. It is estimated that more than 11 million people practice the mind-body regime on a regular basis, recognizing it as a mindful, moderate health practice.

Pilates was created by Joseph Pilates, the German-born son of a prize-winning gymnast father and a naturopath mother. Sickly as a child, Joseph took an interest in body conditioning and came to believe modern lifestyle, bad posture and inefficient breathing contributed to poor health. He eventually made his living as a boxer, circus performer and self-defense trainer in England. During World War I, Pilates was interned as an “enemy alien” with other German citizens.While in the camp, he helped other detainees who had injuries or illnesses perform exercises —precise movements to help strengthen, stretch, and stabilize key muscles—that eventually became known as Pilates.

A Pilates session increases strength and flexibility, lengthens the body and aligns the spine. It does not, however, build muscle mass. The central component to Pilates is the mind-body connection. Focusing on the core or postural muscles, which are critical to providing support to the spine, participants become more aware of the body, their posture improves and movement becomes more graceful. The central component to Pilates is the mind-body connection.

Breathing and centering are also key elements of the Pilates method. Each Pilates exercise is accompanied by breathing instructions. In addition, the large muscle groups in our “center” (the abdomen, lower back, hips and buttocks) are fundamental to all Pilates exercises. Finally, the elements of muscle control, precision and fluidity are central to Pilates.

The Pilates method is a safe, sensible exercise system for just about anyone no matter their age or physical condition and can help alleviate back pain and other chronic ailments.

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