

Pilates 101 Manual



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Pilates 101

Manual

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Pictures by Leonard Photography



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Chapter 1 What is Pilates

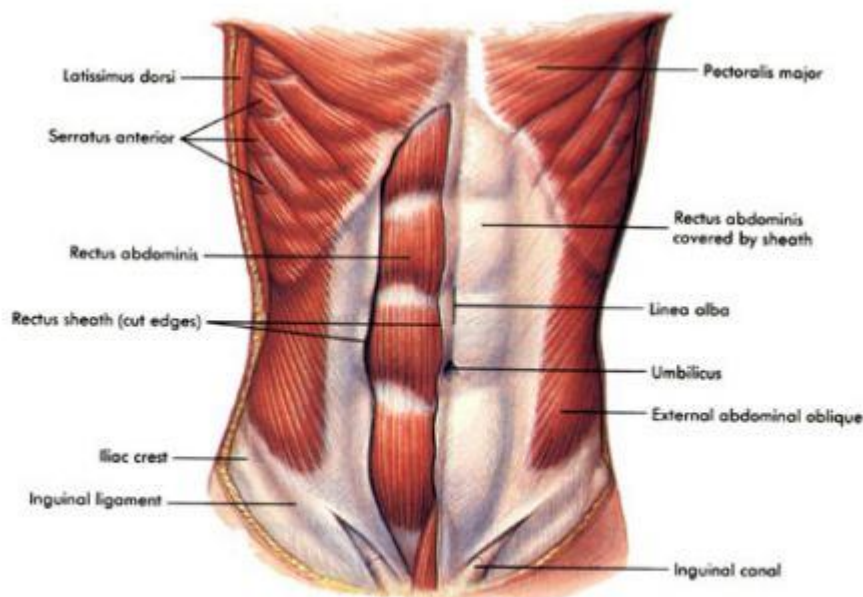
Pilates developed by Joseph Pilates is a form of exercise, focusing on the enhancement of the body through core strength, flexibility, and awareness in order to support efficient and balanced movement.

Exercises in Pilates can be modified to ensure a safe and successful practice. It is a key concept in the Pilates regime.

Core Strength

This is the fundamental in all Pilates exercises. The muscles of the core refers to the inner deep muscles at the abdominal-pelvic region and the back of the torso. Developing the core muscles through the exercises strengthens them further as well as lends support to the superficial muscles to greater support the spine and enable effective movement.

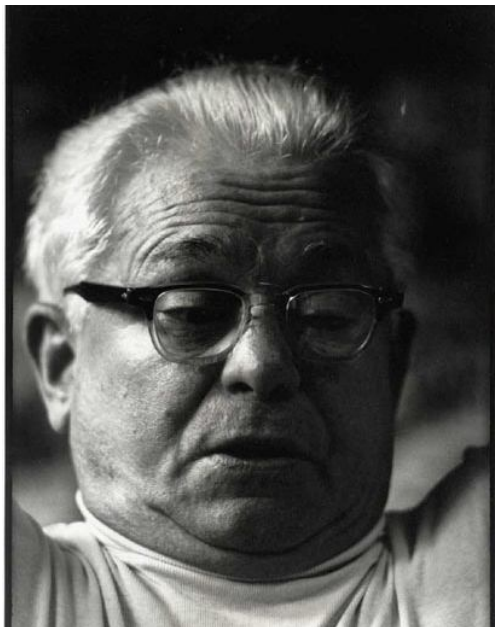
When the core is enhanced, it automatically strengthens and stabilizes the torso. This will in turn support our structure help people to recover and overcome injuries. On top of this, the whole body is able to maneuver freely. With Pilates modifications, it helps to compensate for people with physical limitations and injuries to perform the exercise.



Joseph Pilates and His Story (1881-1967)

We practice Pilates daily but hardly know that he a person with a interesting past set in the backdrop of very important social and political incidents during his time. He was born in 1880 in a town near Dusseldorf, Germany, known as Moenchengladbach. His father was gymnast and mother was a naturopathic physician. One of four children, he was plagued as a child by rickets, asthma and rheumatic fever. Pilates was determined to overcome these childhood ailments during his youth, and took on various physical regimens including body-building, gymnastics, skiing, and diving. By the time he reached age 14, Joseph was posing as a model for anatomy charts. He was greatly inspired by Eastern and Western forms of exercise, and in particular by the ancient Greek and Roman philosophies of attaining and maintaining physical and mental perfection. He tried yoga, Buddhist meditation, and ancient Greek and Roman gymnastic exercises, and kept meticulous written records of what the exercises did for him and how he progressed. Pilates held fast to the ancient Roman credo "Mens sana in corpore sano (A sound mind in a sound body)."

In 1912 he went to England for further training as a boxer. He found employment there as a circus performer. By 1914 he had become a star and toured England with his troupe - he and his brother performed a Greek statue act.



In 1914 when WW I broke out and was interned by the British as an enemy alien. He first went to a small camp near Lancaster, where he began teaching self defense and wrestling to the other Germans, claiming that they would be stronger when they left than when they entered. It was here that Joe began to develop his system of Contrology. Then he was transferred to another camp on The Isle of Man where he became something of a nurse and worked with many internees who suffered from wartime diseases and incarceration. He then began devising equipment to rehabilitate them, taking the springs from the beds and rigging exercise apparatus for the bedridden. In 1918, a terrible epidemic of influenza swept the world, killing millions of people, tens of thousands in England. None of Joe's followers succumbed even though the camps were the hardest hit! He attributed this fact to the effectiveness of his system.

After his release, Joseph returned to Germany. His exercise method gained favor in the dance community, primarily through Rudolf von Laban, who created the form of dance notation most widely used today. Hanya Holm adopted many of Joe's exercises for her modern dance curriculum, and they are still part of the "Holm Technique."

In 1925 he was invited to train the German Army but was not happy with the political direction of Germany so he decided to leave. On the urging of boxing expert, Nat Fleischer and with the aid of Max Schmelling he decided to come to the U.S. It was en route to America that Joe met his future wife, Clara. Clara was a kindergarten teacher who was suffering from arthritic pain and Joe worked with her on the boat to heal her. Once in New York they opened their gym at 939 Eighth Avenue, in the same building that housed rehearsal studios for George Ballanchine's New York City Ballet.

When Mr. Pilates passed away in 1967, he left no will and had designated no line of succession for the "Pilates" work to carry on. Nevertheless, his work would remain. Clara continued to operate what was known as the "Pilates" Studio on Eighth Avenue in New York, where Romana Kryzanowska became the director around 1970. Romana had studied with Joseph and Clara in the early 1940s and then, after a 15-year hiatus spent in Peru, returned to renew her studies.

Kathy Grant and Lolita San Miguel were also students of Joseph and Clara who became teachers. Grant took over the direction at the Bendel's studio in 1972, while San Miguel went on to teach Pilates at Ballet Concierto de Puerto Rico in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In 1967, just before Mr. Pilates' death, both Grant and San Miguel were awarded degrees by the State University of New York to teach "Pilates." These two are believed to be the only "Pilates" practitioners ever certified officially by Mr. Pilates.

Mr. Pilates' definition of physical fitness was: "the attainment and maintenance of a uniformly developed body with a sound mind fully capable of naturally, easily and satisfactorily performing our many and varied daily tasks with spontaneously zest and pleasure". He believed in "natural movements" with the emphasis on doing and being. He has stated, " Everything should be smooth, like a cat. The exercises are done lying, sitting, kneeling, etc., to avoid excess strain on the heart and lungs." Romana is quoted as saying " The key to working with the apparatus is they make you do the work yourself. The fewer springs, the harder the exercise. The springs provide or create endurance, not excess strength. The method is based on the movement of animals, everything about the method is based on moving naturally." Carola Trier said "The method emphasizes restoring the body to true balance, ease and economy of movement and a channeled flow of energy."

Chapter 2 Terms used in Pilates

Abdominal Muscles:

These muscles are comprised of four muscles:

- rectus abdominis
- external oblique
- internal oblique
- transverse abdominis

Together these muscles form a girdle spanning from the front of the torso to the back, up into the ribs and down into the pelvis. This abdominal wall not only helps to stabilize the abdominal region, but also the whole body.

The deepest layer of the abdominal muscles is the transverse, followed by the internal oblique, external oblique, and then the rectus abdominis being the most superficial.

Abduction:

A muscle contraction or movement that brings a limb farther away from the midline of the body.

Adduction:

A muscle contraction or movement that brings a limb closer towards the midline of the body.

Antagonist Muscle:

A muscle that works in opposition to another muscle. The hamstring, gastrocnemius, and popliteus oppose the quadriceps around the knee.

Anterior:

Towards the front surface of the body.

Anterior Tilt of Pelvis:

A placement of the pelvis in which the ASIS are tipped forward, more anteriorly, than the pubic bone and significantly lower than the PSIS.

ASIS:

Common acronym which stands for anterior superior iliac spine. They are also called the hip bones which are located right underneath front pockets in pants.

In pilates we commonly palpate the ASIS to feel for level hips or movement in the pelvis when aiming for stabilization.

Atlas:

The first vertebra in the spine right below the base of the neck. The first, of two, vertebra that are put into flexion during a head nod.

Axis:

The second vertebra in the spine below the base of the neck. The second vertebra that is put into flexion during a head nod.

Bilateral:

A movement using both sides.

Cervical Vertebrae:

These seven vertebrae are located in the neck. These vertebrae are the most mobile of the vertebrae in the spine.

Coccyx:

Commonly known as the tailbone. Comprised of three or four fused bones, the coccyx is located directly beneath the sacrum.

Concentric muscle contraction:

A shortening of a muscle during contraction.

Eccentric muscle contraction:

A lengthening of a muscle while contracting.

Extension:

The movement of a joint which is increasing the joint angle.

Flexion:

The movement of a joint which is decreasing the joint angle.

Head Nod:

The flexion of the first two vertebrae, atlas and axis, of the cervical spine to protect the head and neck from injury.

Hip Flexors:

The muscles which are commonly referred to as a group which flex the leg at the hip. They hip flexors are:

- rectus femoris
- gluteus medius
- gluteus minimus
- pectineus
- tensor fasciae latae
- sartorius
- psoas major
- iliacus

Hyperextension:

Movement of a joint which is past, or greater, than a healthy anatomical position. Often this occurs in elbows and knees and is referred to as a “locked” elbow or knee.

In Pilates hyperextension is avoided upon because of the unhealthy stress and weight that is put on the joint, instead of the engagement of the muscles around the joint to support the joint in movement.

Imprinted Pelvis:

The position that is used in Pilates to protect the low back and strengthen obliques. The position is obtained by lengthening the low back and shortening the distance between the lowest rib and the ASIS. There would be no gap between the lumbar and the mat in most cases.

Insertion of a Muscle:

The place of attachment of a muscle to a bone which is more mobile. The other attachment site is the origin.

Isometric Contraction:

A muscle contraction which does not change in muscle length with the increase of tension. E.g. muscles which stabilize the torso during the hundred.

Kyphosis:

A condition in which the natural curve of the thoracic spine is increased, also known as hunchback.

Lateral Breathing: Directing the breath into the sides and back of the ribcage.

In lateral breathing we breathe deeply, all the way down the spine and into the pelvic bowl, but emphasize expanding the breath into the back and sides of the ribcage.

When the abs are pulled in properly, they protect the spine and act like a supportive corset for the whole trunk. Knowing how to breathe well while keeping the abs contracted gives us extra support throughout an exercise. As you practice lateral breathing, you will find that you are able to perform Pilates exercises with greater ease. It helps make the scoop of abs easier and enhances the sense of lengthening the spine with the breath.

Lateral Pelvic Tilt:

A type of pelvic tilt in which one side of the pelvis is higher than the other.

Ligament:

Connective tissue which connects bone to bone.

Lordosis:

A condition which is described as when the natural curve in the lumbar spine is increased, when viewed from the side.

Lumbar Vertebrae:

These five vertebrae are located in the lower back. These vertebrae are larger and are made to help support weight of the upper body.

Lumbo-Pelvic Region:

A term that is used often in Pilates to describe the area including the pelvis and lumbar vertebrae. Often this term is used when talking about neutral or imprinted pelvis. Usually we say lumbo-pelvic region instead of spine or pelvis because neutral and imprint involves both the pelvis and spine.

Medial:

These are movements which draw closer to the midline.

Neutral Pelvis: When the pelvis is neutral, the pubic bone and the hip bone are in the same plane. This means that the pelvis is not rotated forward in a hyperextension of the spine, or tilted back in a tuck.

Neutral Spine: Neutral Spine is the natural position of the spine when all body parts are in good alignment. When the spine is in neutral, the pelvis is neutral and the natural curves of the back, those of the cervical and lumbar spine, are maintained.

Origin of a Muscle:

The attachment of a muscle to a bone which is more stationary. The other attachment end is the insertion.

Pelvis:

The area of your body which is composed of two hip bones, sacrum, and coccyx.

Pelvic Rotation:

This occurs when the pelvis is rotated counter-clockwise or clockwise. It is often evident by placing a hand on each ASIS and feeling if one is pushed further forward than the other.

Pelvic Floor:

The pelvic floor forms a sheet of muscles between the pubic bone, coccyx, and the ischium. It is important to engage the pelvic floor because it helps fire the transversus and stabilize the pelvis.

Pelvic Tilt:

This happens when the pelvis is tipped too far anteriorly (ASIS lower than PSIS) or posteriorly (PSIS tipped lower than ASIS.) The ideal is neutral.

Note: In women a neutral pelvis will have the ASIS very slightly lower than the PSIS.

Pilates stance: Pilates stance refers to a slightly turned out position of the legs. The legs are rotated outward at the hip, leaving the heels together and the toes apart. This position emphasizes the center line of the body.

Posterior:

Pertaining to the back surface of the body.

Posterior Tilt of Pelvis:

This occurs when the PSIS is lower than the ASIS. In women, the ASIS is slightly lower than the PSIS for a neutral position. If a woman's ASIS and PSIS are level she is considered slightly posteriorly tilted.

PSIS:

Common acronym which stands for posterior superior iliac spine. They are located in the low back at the base of the pelvis. Put your hands on your hips with your fingers towards your stomach and your thumbs towards your back, your thumbs should naturally be resting very close to them.

Look for the 'little dimple' over each PSIS.

Prone:

A position, lying down, which means that you are facing down to the mat.

Range of Motion:

The movement that is created from a joint by contracting muscles.

Sacrum:

These fused four or five vertebrae are located directly below the lumbar vertebrae and situated in the back and between the crests of the pelvis.

Scapulae:

Also referred to as shoulder blades, these bony protrusions lay freely on the back. Because of their unique attachment to the back, muscular connection is quite important here.

Scoop the abs: Scooping the abs is a fairly literal image whereby in Pilates we want to lengthen and deepen the abdominals in toward the spine, feeling as if we are hollowing out the abdominal area.

Sit Bones:

Also known as the ischial tuberosity, they are the bones that you feel underneath your bottom when you sit on a hard surface. They are the bones which are the downward protrusions of the pelvis.

Spine:

Also called the vertebral column, the spine consists of twenty-four vertebrae. The spine is divided into different parts. They are:

cervical vertebrae (7)
thoracic vertebrae (12)
lumbar vertebrae (5)
sacrum (4-5 fused)
coccyx (3-4 fused)

Supine:

A position, when lying, which means that you are lying on your back.

Staccato breath:

A short and quick breath pattern which promotes a full breathing pattern and prevents breath holding.

Tabletop legs: The knees are bent so that the thighs are perpendicular to the floor and the shins are parallel to the floor.

Tendon:

Tissue that connects muscle to bone.

Thoracic Vertebrae:

These twelve vertebra are located in the thorax. Each of these vertebra have an attached rib and do not move as much because of their stabilizing and protective jobs.

Unilateral:

A movement using one side while trying to maintain neutral stability throughout the rest of the body.

Vertebrae:

One of 26 bones that make up the spine and help support the body.

Zip it up: To "zip up" is to drop the chest, pull in all of your abdominal muscles, and to engage the pelvic floor. The feeling is to bring everything in toward the center line. The image comes from pretending that you are putting on a pair of very tight jeans.

Chapter 3 Self Postural Analysis

Postural analysis helps to identify areas where your body may be over compensating itself from either recent or past injuries such as:-

- § Tightness in the neck
- § Persistent headaches
- § Upper back problems
- § Lower back problems
- § Pelvic tilts
- § Feet alignment

We also look at recent injuries carrying out a range of movements involving the injured part in order to identify whether it is a muscle, bone or joint problem. Finding out which areas are affected or whether there is a psychological link to the injury.

Types of Posture

- n Good Posture
- n Kyphotic-lordotic Posture
- n Flat-back Posture
- n Sway-back Posture

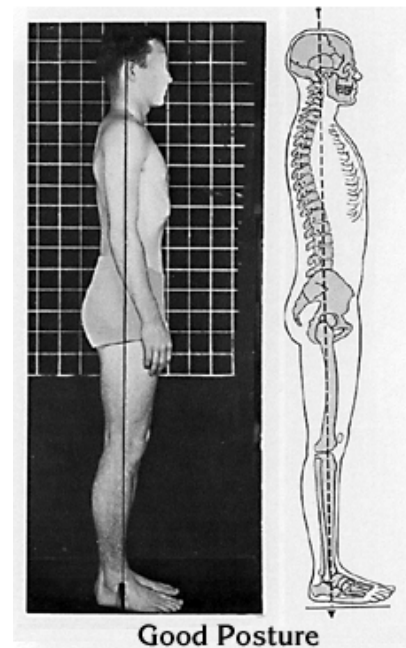
What is a correct posture?

“...that state of muscular and skeletal balance which protects the supporting structures of the body against injury or progressive deformity irrespective of the attitude (erect, lying, squatting, stooping) in which these structures are working or resting. Under such conditions the muscles will function most efficiently and the optimum positions are afforded for the thoracic and abdominal organs.” (AAOS)

The Line of reference hypothetically is a projection of the gravity line in the coronal plane, meaning it divides the body into front and back portions of equal weight. The portions are not symmetrical. Pelvis is in neutral position: anterior-superior iliac spines and the symphysis pubis are in same vertical planes

Line is...

- n Through external auditory meatus (Ear)
- n Midway through shoulder
- n Through lumbar bodies
- n Slightly anterior to midline of knee
- n Slightly anterior to lateral malleolus

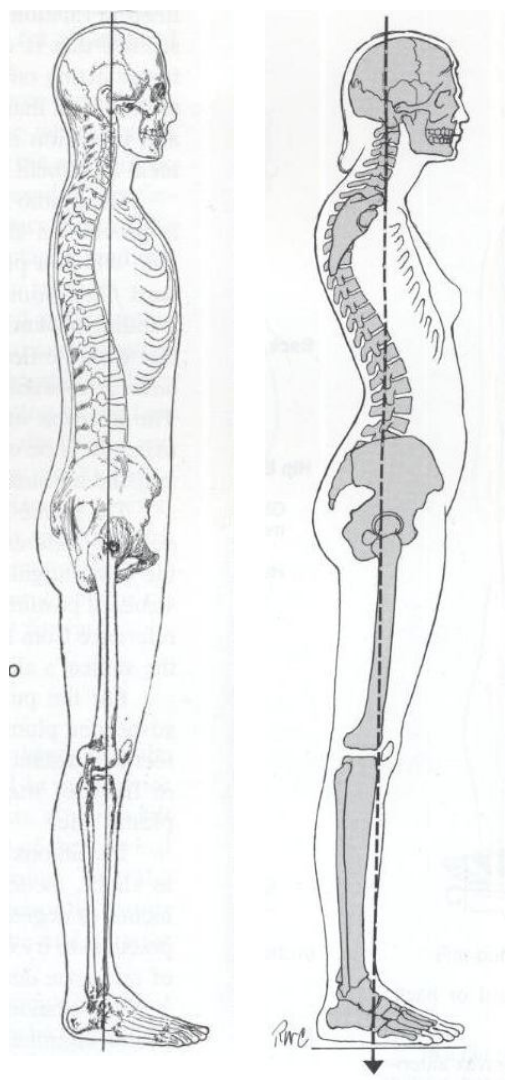


What is a poor posture?

“...faulty relationship of the various parts of the body which produces increased strain on the supporting structures and in which there is less efficient balance of the body over its base of support.” (AAOS)

Kyphotic – Lordotic Posture

This posture can be a result of elongation and weakness neck flexors, muscles that straighten the back, external obliques, and hamstrings. The Neck extensor, hip flexors, and sometimes lower back are stronger.



Ideal

Head- Forward
 Cervical Spine- Hyperextended
 Thoracic Vertebrae- increased flexion
 Lumbar Vertebrae- lordosis; hyperextended
 Pelvis- Anterior tilt (forward and down)
 Knees- hyperextended
 Ankle joints- plantar flexed, legs are behind midline

Flat Back Posture

Head- Forward

Cervical Spine- extended

Thoracic Vertebrae- reduced curvature (extension)

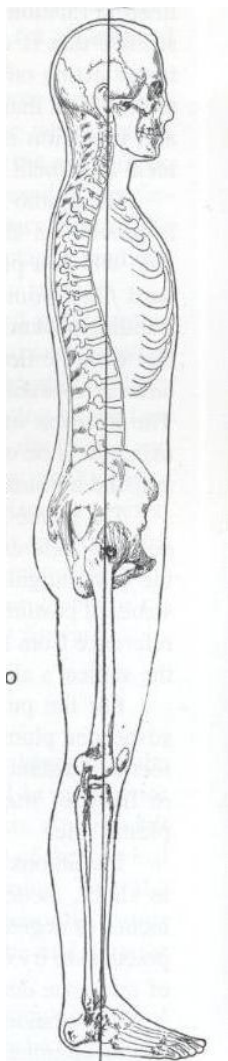
Lumbar Vertebrae – straight (flexion)

Pelvis- posterior tilt (backward) and down)

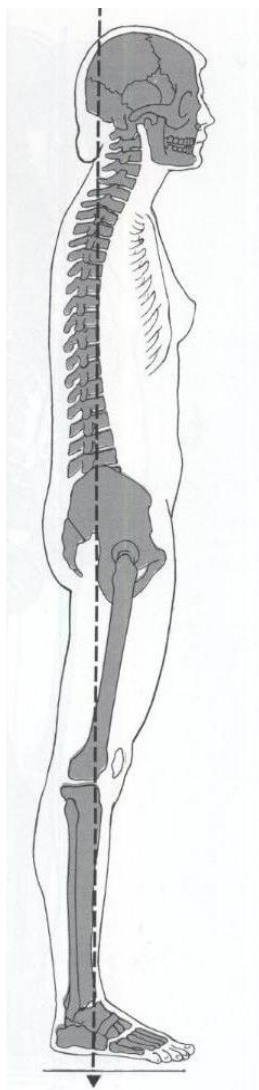
Hips- extended

Knees- extended

Ankle joints- slightly plantar flexed



IDEAL



Sway Back Posture

Head: Forward

Cervical Spine -Hyper extended

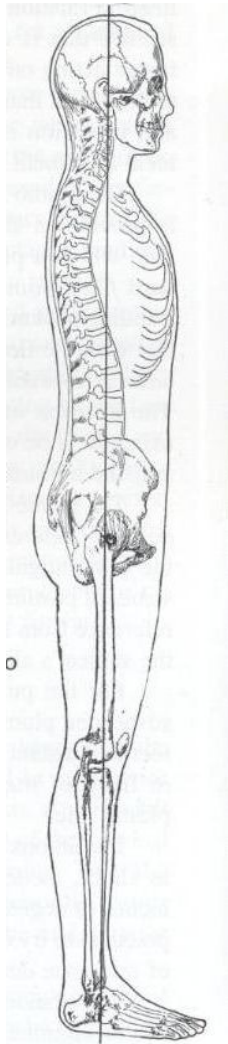
Thoracic Vertebrae- slight flexion

Lumbar Vertebrae –slight extension

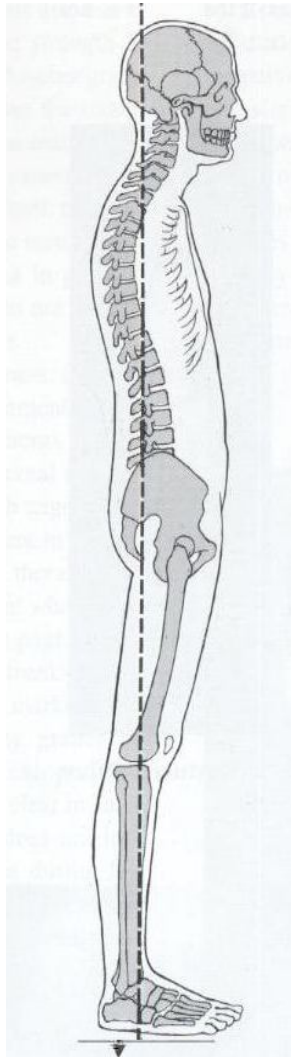
Pelvis-posterior tilt and anterior to midline

Hips- flexed

Knees- Hyper extended

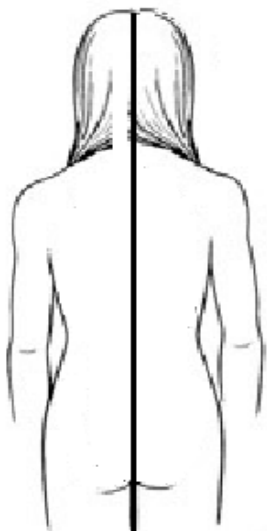


IDEAL



Scoliosis

Scoliosis is more common among girls and a scoliotic curve is more likely to progress in females than in males. Curves in the thoracic region or curves where the apex is more caudal (closer to the head), are more likely to progress than other types of curves. Curves between 60 to 100 degrees and greater can cause respiratory problems and numerous other health problems. The main goal of treatment of this is to prevent progression of the curve magnitude.



1. Check if shoulders are level
2. Check distance between arms and side of body
3. Check if hips are level
4. Check if head is centered over the pelvis.

Chapter 4 Basic Principles

There are 5 basic principles which are fundamental to effective and efficient Pilates exercises. Without following these principles, the exercises would merely be a crunch class without proper body and mind control.

1. Breathing

The first of the 5 principles is breathing. A relaxed and full breathing pattern promotes focus and concentration. Proper breathing ensures that enough oxygen is flowing to the muscles that are being contracted, and helps prevent unnecessary tension.

As the core muscles have to be engaged most of the time, breathing with expansion of the belly is not possible. In Pilates, intercostal breathing is used. This is a breath pattern involving an expansion of the rib cage out to the sides and back without allowing the shoulders to lift. Our lower lobes of the lungs are bigger than the upper lobes, and hence there is more efficient gas exchange with this breathing pattern. In addition, it will help us engage the transversus abdominis muscle which in turn stabilize our torso.

In Pilates breathing, we inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth with pursed lips.

a) Breathing in Sitting Position



Sit up tall with knees bent. Hands gently rest on your shins.
Inhale, to prepare



Exhale, round the back and curl forward.
Inhale, stay in this position, feel the ribs moving outwards and backwards.
Exhale, feel the ribs moving towards the midline of the body.
Repeat for 2 more breaths before sitting up.

b) Breathing in Sitting Position with elastic band



Wrap an elastic band around the rib cage region and practice intercostals breathing.
Inhale, feel the back ribs pushing against the elastic band.
Exhale, feel the band becoming loose.
Practice for 5 times.

c) Breathing in Supine Position



Lie down on the back with knees bent at hip width apart.
Place the hands at the lower ribs, with the small gap between both middle fingers.
Inhale, feel the movement of the ribs and middle fingers moving away from each other.
Exhale, feel the fingers coming closer to each other.
Practice for 5 times.

2. Pelvic Stabilization

Pelvic Stabilization is emphasized as it trains the core muscles correctly without incurring any strain on the lower back with correct placement. There are 2 important placements for the pelvis and lumbar region, namely: neutral and imprinted position.

Neutral



Lie down on the back with bent knees.
There exists a small gap between the lower back and the mat which is the natural curvature of the lumbar vertebrae.

Use it when one or both legs are on the mat.

Imprint



Exhale, draw the navel to spine, slightly tuck the tailbone under and imprint the lower back onto the mat.

Use it when both legs are off the mat.

Wrong



(X) DO NOT lift the hips off the ground by overusing the abs or the gluteal muscles.

3. Ribcage Stabilization

The movement of the ribs will affect the thoracic vertebrae alignment, which in turn affect the lumbar vertebrae placement. Together with Pilates breathing, each time you exhale, feel the ribs drawing towards each other. This is especially important with movements of raised arms. When the deep core muscles are relaxed, the ribs will pop up and lower back arched off the mat when the arms are taken overhead.



Lie down on the back with bent knees. Focus on the deep abdominal muscles and keep the pelvis in a neutral position.



Inhale, raise the arms vertically overhead.
Exhale, lower the arms back as much as you can without popping out your ribs and lifting the lower back too much off the mat.
Inhale, raise the arms up again
Exhale, return to starting position.
Repeat for 5 times.

Wrong



Do not hyper-extend your lower back and pop the ribs out as this will strain the lower back muscles and will not train the core muscles as effectively.

4. Scapula Stabilization

Scapulae are the 2 shoulder blades located at the upper back. These 2 bones are not connected directly to the spine. As such, muscular engagement is necessary to keep them stable. This will minimize any strain at your neck and upper trapezius muscles.

A guideline for proper placement is that there is sufficient distance between the shoulders and the ears, the shoulders are not rounded forward and the back is not pinched.

a) Elevation and Depression



Sit up tall with knees bent.
Inhale, raise (elevate) the shoulders towards the ears.



Exhale, press them down (depress) to create space for the neck.
Repeat for 5 times.

b) Protraction and Retraction



Sit up tall with knees bent.
Bring the hands forward at shoulder level.
Inhale, reach the hands forward and widen (protract) the scapulae, increasing the distance between each other.



Exhale, draw the scapulae (retract) slightly towards each other
Repeat for 5 times.

5. Cervical Stabilization

We should maintain our natural curvature of our neck region or cervical vertebrae during most Pilates exercises.

In supine position, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between the chin and the neck. We have to hold the fruit without allowing it to be crushed or dropped out. This is to protect the delicate structure of our cervical vertebrae and to avoid overstraining our neck.

In prone position, avoid lifting the head too high and crunching up the back of the neck.

For certain people, a small pillow can be placed below the head to achieve neutral placement.



Correct: Tuck the chin down slightly before any exercise. Maintain the same line as your spinal alignment.

Inhale, gently nod the chin.

Exhale, raise the back slightly off the floor, maintaining the cervical stabilization.

Inhale, hold

Exhale, return to starting position.



Wrong: Do not tilt the head too far back.



Wrong: Do not tilt the jam the neck too much.

Chapter 5 Preparatory Movements

This is to warm up and lubricate the major joints prior to the Pilates exercises.

1. Neck Exercise



Stand tall with feet together.
Inhale to prepare
Exhale, turn the head to the right.
Inhale, come back to centre.
Exhale, turn the head to the left.
Inhale, back to centre.
Repeat once more.



Exhale, bring the chin to chest.



Inhale, lift the chin up.
Repeat down and up.

2. Roll Down



Exhale, chin to chest. Roll the body down by articulating the spine one vertebra at a time from the top to bottom. Round the back as much as you can while rolling down. Lastly, bring the hands down to the floor.

3. Cat Stretch



Bend the knees and come onto all fours. Keep the spine in a neutral position.



Exhale, chin to chest, tuck the tailbone under, suck the belly in and round the back for a cat stretch. Inhale, back to neutral position. Repeat 3 times.

4. Spinal Balance



Bend the knees and come onto all fours. Keep the spine in a neutral position.



Exhale, engage the core muscles and extend the right leg back without moving the hips. Take care not to hyper-extend your back. Repeat 3 times.

5. Single Arm Circles



Raise the right arm up vertically. Start drawing 5 big circles with the right hand. Change direction and complete another 5 rounds. Repeat on the left side.

6. Hip Rolls



Lie down on the back with neutral spine position.
 Bend the knees and place the feet about hip distance apart.
 Inhale, to prepare.
 Exhale, come into imprint, tuck the tailbone under and roll the hips up, articulating the spine one vertebra at a time.
 Inhale, stay.
 Exhale, roll down the back with one vertebra at a time.
 Repeat 3 times.

7. Mini Crunch



Lie down on the back with neutral spine position.
 Bend the knees and place the feet about hip distance apart.
 Inhale, to prepare.
 Exhale, stabilize the shoulder blades, scoop the belly in and crunch up, reaching the hands towards the toes.
 Inhale, stay.
 Exhale, back to starting position.
 Repeat 3 times.

8. Supine Spinal Twist



Bring the feet up into a table top position with knees together.
 Place the hands on the floor horizontally, palms down.

Inhale, to prepare.
 Exhale, lower the legs down to the right side without touching the floor.
 Take care not to lift the shoulders away from the mat.
 Change side and repeat for 3 times.

Chapter 6 Beginners' Routine

These 21 exercises are recommended for beginners in Pilates. There are different modification levels to suit various fitness levels. Choose your own level such that you are challenging yourself, without over-straining. You need not rush through the exercises, instead, start slow first to get the correct alignment and flow. When you become more familiar with regular practice, the exercises should be done with rhythm and flow without any breaks.

1. The Hundred

(Repetition: 1 time)

Introduction:

This is the first exercise of the original Joseph Pilates routine. It serves as a warm up to increase the blood circulation and body temperature. As the name of the exercise goes, we get a good core warm up and stay activated for 100 counts.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back in a pelvis-imprinted position. Bend the knees at 90 degrees with the shins parallel to the floor, knees together, toes pointing away. This is called tabletop position. Place the arms by the side of the body, palms down.



Exercise:

Inhale, lengthen the back of the neck

Exhale, use the powerhouse to raise the head and shoulders up, reaching the arms forward. Straighten the legs with knees together and lower to about 45 degrees. Keep the shoulder blades stabilized.

Inhale for 5 counts, pulse the arms up and down rhythmically with each count

Exhale for 5 counts, maintain in the same position and continue pulsing.

This is 1 breath or 10 counts.

Continue until 10 breaths or 100 counts.

Inhale, stay and reach the arms further forward

Exhale, return to starting position.



For beginners, you may break down the exercise into smaller parts according to your own capability e.g. 2 parts of 50 counts.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep both feet on the ground in a pelvis-neutral position instead of straight legs at 45 degrees.



Difficulty 2: Keep legs at tabletop position in a pelvis-imprinted position



Difficulty 3: Keep legs straight at 90 degrees



Difficulty 4: Lower the legs to your maximum to which you are able to maintain in an imprinted position



Difficulty 5: Hold a block in between your ankles





| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is over arched, causing a strain in the lower back | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine and maintain an imprinted position |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Wrists or elbows are moving up and down | Lock the wrists and elbows, movement should come from the shoulders. |
| Upper body is flexed up too much, causing the rectus ab to pop up | Lower the upper body down slightly, focus on working the transversus ab rather than the rectus ab. |

Benefits:

Warms up the body

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Trains the body about imprinted position

2. Roll up and down

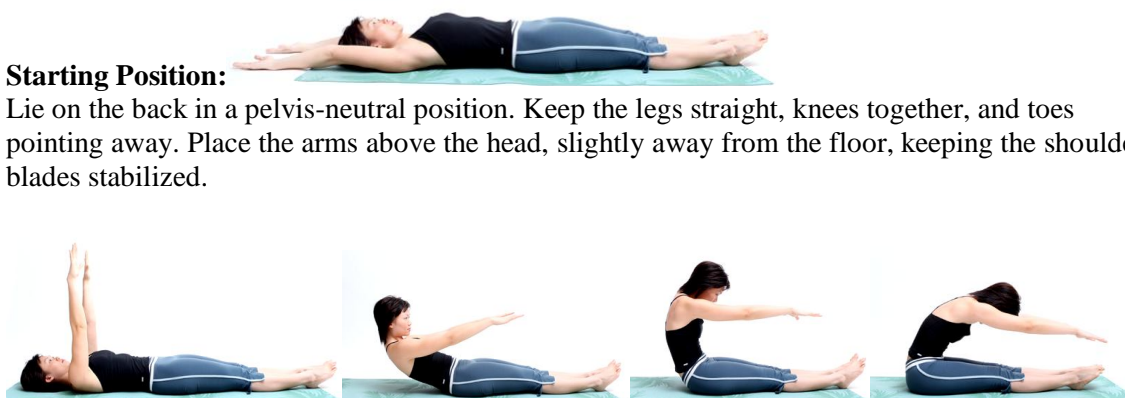
(Repetition: 5-8 times)

Introduction:

This exercise resembles a caterpillar rolling up and down. It helps to articulate the spine and strengthens the abdominal muscles. From Roll up and down, we can learn how to maintain the C-curve, which serves as a foundation for other more challenging rolling exercises.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back in a pelvis-neutral position. Keep the legs straight, knees together, and toes pointing away. Place the arms above the head, slightly away from the floor, keeping the shoulder blades stabilized.



Exercise:

Inhale, gentle head nod and raise the arms up towards the ceiling

Exhale, use the powerhouse, navel to spine, bring the body off the floor to sitting positions, starting from the upper back, middle back to lower back, articulating the spine. Inhale, roll through imprint position.

Exhale, continue to roll, scoop the belly in and stretch forward, maintaining a C-curve.

(You may use also 1 exhalation to come to a forward bend during a faster movement)

Inhale, sit upright and stack the spine up

Exhale, scoop the belly, forming a C-curve, roll down one vertebra at a time in a controlled manner. Return to starting position.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep both knees bent with feet on the floor instead of straight legs. Use the hands to walk up behind the thighs if it is still challenging.

Difficulty 2: With straight legs, roll up holding an elastic band

Difficulty 3: As mentioned above

Difficulty 4: Keep arms overhead all the time

Difficulty 5: Hold a block with the hands



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|--|---|
| Using momentum to swing up | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine and roll up slowly |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady, use the exhalation to activate the core muscles further |
| Back comes up in a straight line, not rolling through imprint position | Hip flexors are being used instead of the abdominal muscles. Scoop the belly in and articulate the spine instead. Do it slowly to get the imprint position instead of rushing up. |
| Shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Tummy popping up | Scoop the belly in, focus on working the transversus ab rather than the rectus ab. |

Benefits:

Emphasize rolling through imprint.

Articulates and massages the spine.

Works on the deep abdominal muscles and deep erector spinae muscles with slow and isolated movement.

Excellent for people with flat backs and lordosis.

3. Single Leg Circles

(Repetition: 5 circles in each direction)

Introduction:

This exercise is done by drawing circles with one leg in the air with lying down. It is the initial practice to learn how to use the powerhouse to keep the hips stable.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back in a pelvis-neutral position. Keep the legs straight, knees together, and toes pointing away. Raise the right leg up to 90 degrees, keep the knee straight and toes pointing up.



Exercise:

Inhale, reach the right leg across the body as you start to draw a small circle

Exhale, complete the circle by bringing the leg back.

Pause for a short while before drawing another circle.

Continue and draw 5 circles in total, after which, 5 circles in another direction. Change legs and repeat the whole exercise.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep both knees bent



Difficulty 2: Keep bottom knee bent and top leg straight



Difficulty 3: Both legs straight, use an elastic band over the top leg and pull with both hands



Difficulty 4: As mentioned, small circles

Difficulty 5: Draw bigger circles



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|--|--|
| Hips are rocking left and right | Engage the abdominal muscles to stabilize pelvis. If not, draw smaller circles. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jerked back, chin is lifted too far up | Lengthen the back of the neck by pressing the head firmly onto the mat |
| Shoulders are elevated | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. Pin the shoulder and arms down. |

Benefits:

Strengthen the powerhouse
 Strengthen the hip muscles
 Stabilize the pelvis
 Increase the hamstrings and inner thighs flexibility
 Increase suppleness in the hip joints

4. Rolling Like A Ball

(Repetition: 8-10 times)

Introduction:

This is a fun exercise which massages the spine and works the powerhouse at the same time. The slower you roll, the more you are engaging your powerhouse. The faster you roll, the more you are using momentum instead of your powerhouse to move.

Starting Position:

Sit near the front of the mat, bend the knees into the chest and hold the ankles. Point the toes. Press the shoulder blades down, tuck in the chin slightly and form a C-curve with the spine. Balance on the sit-bones. Do not change the shape of the 'ball' doing the exercise.



Exercise:

Inhale, roll back to the shoulder blades, keeping the original shape of the ball. Keep the hands on the ankle throughout.

Exhale, scoop the belly and roll up to starting position.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep both feet on the ground with knees bent and practise the C-curve

Difficulty 2: Keep both feet off the ground with knees bent and practise the C-curve

Difficulty 3: As mentioned

Difficulty 4: Hold a block in between your ankles



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|--|---|
| Head touches the mat at the end of a roll | Never roll onto the neck or head, control and stop at the shoulder blades |
| Using momentum, rolling too fast | Pause in between each time and roll slowly, using the powerhouse to control |
| Lower back is flat during rolling | Keep contracting the abs, form a C-curve to initiate the rolling movement |
| Shoulders are tensed | Keep the shoulders relaxed |
| Rolling movement is lop-sided, more on the right/left side | Control the movement and roll on the middle of the spine |

Benefits:

Contract the transversus abdominis muscles throughout the rolling movement

Promotes flexion of the lumbar spine, good for people with lordosis

Rounds the back, good for people with flat back

Massages the spine

5. Stomach Series: Single Leg Stretch

(Repetition: 8 to 10 times)

Introduction:

This is the first of the five exercises of the stomach series. When the five exercises are done together without a break, it challenges the endurance of the powerhouse. Beginners can take a breather in between these exercises. This exercise is named as Single Leg Stretch as one leg is stretched out while the other is bent towards the chest.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back with legs in tabletop position, pelvis in imprint. Raise the upper body off the floor slightly, with shoulder blades pressed down, neck long, chin slightly tucked. Place the hands on the sides of the shins or ankles.



Exercise:

Inhale, prepare

Exhale, stretch the right leg out and draw the left knee in. Bring the right hand on the left knee and left hand on the left ankle.

Inhale, get ready to switch side

Exhale, change side

This is 1 repetition.

Return to starting position and get ready for the second exercise of the stomach series.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep the head on the floor and practice the leg movements



Difficulty 2: Head off the floor, keep the stretched leg vertical



Difficulty 3: Place the hands behind the head to support it off the floor, keep the stretched leg at 45 degrees



Difficulty 4: Head off the floor, keep the stretched leg at 45 degrees



Difficulty 5: Head off the floor, keep the stretched leg as lower as you can



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Body is rocking side to side | Center the movement from the core instead of jerking the legs to move. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Hand is wrongly placed, movements are not coordinated | Slow down and practice with modification 1. |

Benefits:

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Tones the thighs

Works on the coordination of movement

Activates the obliques and lower back muscles to keep the body stable

6. Stomach Series: Double Leg Stretch

(Repetition: 5 to 8 times)

Introduction:

This is the second of the five exercises of the stomach series. It is more challenging as compared to the single leg stretch.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back with legs in tabletop position, pelvis in imprint. Raise the upper body off the floor slightly, with shoulder blades pressed down, neck long, chin slightly tucked. Place the hands on the sides of the shins or ankles.



Exercise:

Inhale, reach the arms back and extend the legs out at 45 degree angle at the same time
Exhale, circle the arms back and draw the knees into the chest, back to starting position.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep the legs in a tabletop position and practice the movement in the upper body

Difficulty 2: Keep the legs 90 degrees vertically or lower them slightly

Difficulty 3: As mentioned

Difficulty 4: Holding a block between the ankles



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is arched off the floor | Contract the abdominal muscles and use the transversus abdominus to stabilize the whole trunk. Move on to a simpler modification if it is too challenging at the moment. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |

Benefits:

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Tones the thighs

Works on the coordination of movement

Activates the obliques and lower back muscles to keep the body stable

7. Stomach Series: Single Leg Straight

(Repetition: 8 to 10 times)

Introduction:

This is the third of the five exercises of the stomach series. It targets the lower part of the abdominal muscles by large sweeping movement of the legs. This improves the flexibility of the hamstrings as well. Another common name of this exercise is called scissors.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back with legs in tabletop position, pelvis in imprint. Raise the upper body off the floor slightly, with shoulder blades pressed down, neck long, chin slightly tucked. Place the hands on the sides of the shins or ankles. Elbows are pointed outwards.



Exercise:

Inhale, stretch the right leg towards the head and the left leg away from the body. Keep both knees straight. Catch hold of the right ankle or shin, with the elbows opening outwards.

Exhale, pulse 2 counts, bringing the right leg closer to the head each time

Inhale, get ready to switch side

Exhale, change side

This is 1 repetition.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep the knees slightly bent



Difficulty 2: Keep the top leg at 90 degrees and the bottom leg at 45 degrees



Difficulty 3: As mentioned, or for those whose neck is straining, place the hands behind the head



Difficulty 4: Hands on the floor



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Body is rocking side to side | Center the movement from the core instead of jerking the legs to move. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Hand is wrongly placed, movements are not coordinated | Slow down and practice with modification 1. |

Benefits:

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Tones the thighs

Works on the coordination of movement

Activates the obliques and lower back muscles to keep the body stable

8. Stomach Series: Double Leg Straight

(Repetition: 6 to 8 times)

Introduction:

This is very challenging exercise and focuses on the lower part of the abdominal muscles. It is commonly seen in fitness workouts and known as double leg raises. Pilates style emphasizes on quality rather than quantity.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back with legs in tabletop position, pelvis in imprint. Straighten both legs up to 90 degrees. Bring the hands to support the head, with elbows wide opened. Raise the upper body off slightly and suck in the belly.



Exercise:

Inhale, lower the legs down to about 45 degrees
Exhale, bring the legs back up to 90 degrees

This is 1 repetition. The breathing can be alternated after 3 or 4 times.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Bend the knees at 90 degrees



Difficulty 2: Lower the legs slightly instead of 90 degrees

Difficulty 3: As mentioned

Difficulty 4: Lower the legs to your maximum and add a block in between the ankles



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is arched off the floor | Contract the abdominal muscles and use the transversus abdominus to stabilize the whole trunk. Move on to a simpler modification if it is too challenging at the moment. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is strained, chest is collapsed, elbows are close together | Open the chest by bring the elbows outwards. Let the neck rests on the hands |

Benefits:

Increases the strength of the transversus and rectus abdominal muscles.

Tones the thighs

9. Stomach Series: Obliques

(Repetition: 6 to 8 times)

Introduction:

This is the last of the five exercises of the stomach series. Is it named Obliques after the name of the core muscles that runs diagonally along the abdomen. This exercise is also commonly known as criss-cross.

Starting Position:

Lie on the back with legs in tabletop position, pelvis in imprint. Bring the hands to support the head, with elbows wide opened. Raise the upper body off slightly and suck in the belly.



Exercise:

Inhale, prepare

Exhale, stretch the right leg out and draw the left knee in. Rotate the body and bring the right shoulder towards the left knee, keeping both hips in contact with the floor at all times

Inhale, get ready to switch side

Exhale, change side

This is 1 repetition.

Return to starting position and get ready for the second exercise of the stomach series.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: Keep the stretched leg vertical

Difficulty 2: Keep the stretched leg at 45 degrees

Difficulty 3: Keep the stretched leg as lower as you can

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Body is rocking side to side | Center the movement from the core instead of jerking the legs to move. |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |
| Neck is strained, chest is collapsed, elbows are close together | Open the chest by bring the elbows outwards. Let the neck rests on the hands |

Benefits:

Increases the strength and endurance of the core muscles, especially the obliques muscles.

Works on the coordination of movement

10. Spine Stretch Forward

(Repetition: 1 time)

Introduction:

This is a static stretch after the dynamic stomach series. It is not the same as a forward bend or hamstrings stretch, instead, the core muscles are being worked out while rounding and back reaching forward. Imagine there is a big beach ball in front of the abdomen and try reaching forward.

Starting Position:

Come to a sitting position with both legs straight, slightly wider than hip width apart. Sit up tall with the spine straight. Point the toes up towards the ceiling and anchor the heels onto the floor.



Exercise:

Inhale, raise both arms up

Exhale, suck in the belly, engage the powerhouse and reach forward, rounding the back. Stay for 3 to 5 breaths and feel the stretch on the back muscles. Keep the breathing steady.

Return to starting position.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: For those with tight hamstrings, sit on a block or stacked towel, bend the knees.

Difficulty 2: As mentioned

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Fold with flat back | Curl the belly in and round the back |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |

Benefits:

Tones the powerhouse

Stretches the hamstrings

Stretches the back muscles

11. Saw

(Repetition: 3-5 time)

Introduction:

This movement resembles a sawing action and recruits the abdominal muscles to keep the movement controlled. It involves the rotation and flexion of the spine.

Starting Position:

Come to a sitting position with both legs straight, slightly wider than hip width apart. Sit up tall with the spine straight. Point the toes up towards the ceiling and anchor the heels onto the floor. Raise the hands to shoulder level height, thumbs up.



Exercise:

Inhale, twist the torso without moving the hips to the left

Exhale, suck in the belly, engage the powerhouse and reach diagonally forward, reaching towards the side of the foot

Back hand maintain engaged with a pulling action to further bring flex the body

Inhale, come up and twist to the other side

Exhale, flex forward to reach to your other foot

Repeat 3-5 times.

Return to starting position.

Modifications:

Difficulty 1: For those with tight hamstrings, sit on a block or stacked towel, bend the knees.

Difficulty 2: As mentioned

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Fold with flat back | Curl the belly in and round the back |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is tucked in too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a kiwi fruit in between |

Benefits:

Tones the powerhouse
 Stretches the hamstrings
 Stretches the back muscles

12. The Spinal Twist

(Repetition: 5)

Introduction:

The greatest challenge of movement is to maintain the spine and muscles of the trunk supple in different areas. Most of the pilates exercises focuses bending forward and reaching backward. In this exercise the trunk stays stable and the arms and the head moves. As we age the side twist lessens and we focus more on forward and backward bends. The range of motion (ROM) becomes limited.

Spine twist increases the ROM in the upper body maintaining the support of the pelvis.

Starting Position:

Sit tall on the sit bones. Suck the belly in so that your upper body is well supported on the pelvis. Dorsi-flex your feet and lengthen your heels. Extend your arms by the side of the shoulders and parallel with the floor so that there is one long line formed by the hands.

Imagine the spine lengthening and energy moving upwards from the floor up to the top of the head. Keep the shoulders relaxed by pinching on the shoulder blades.

If your hamstrings are tight and it is hard for you to sit upright, place a small pillow or folded towel or a block under your sit bones.



Exercise:

Inhale, sit straight up from the torso.

As you exhale 3 times, straighten up further as you turn the torso together with the head from the centre.

The total movement is a 3-part pulse when you exhale to twist half way, and the exhale again to turn two more times.

Inhale as you come to the centre.

Repeat this 5 times on each side.



Modifications:

The twist is from the waist, not from the shoulders. The upper body, including the head, moves as one piece. The pelvis stays stable and does not twist at all. You can check this by making sure that your feet stay even with each other.

- 1: Bend both knees slightly if unable to keep the pelvis and torso stable.
- 2: Place a block under the sit bones or raise the pelvis
- 3: Keep legs straight at 90 degrees
- 4: For beginners, you may break down the exercise into 2 pulses



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is over arched, causing a strain in the lower back | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine |
| Holding of breath and exhaling with 3 pulse | Use the twist as a gauge to exhale in short bursts. Each time you twist exhale. |
| Both feet lifting from the floor | Leave a small gap between the legs and pull the navel closed to the spine by engaging the abdominals |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down backwards |
| Hands are not in line with the shoulders | Look at the corner of the eyes to check if the shoulders and hands are in line and level. |

Benefits:

Warm up the body

Helps to develop the obliques and transversus abdominis

Stabilises the pelvis and upper body and improves flexibility of the spine.

The turning part of the upper body supported by a stationary and stable pelvis is the essence and strong point of this exercise. This is why golfers, tennis players, and those of us wishing to maintain freedom of motion get so much out of this exercise.

13. Supine Stretch

(Repetition: 1)

Introduction:

After all the twist and abdominal crunch, it is time to give your abs a nice stretch to balance up the overworked muscles and gain some energy and breather.

Starting Position and Exercise:

Lie on the back in a pelvis neutral position. Lengthen the knees and straighten the legs, bringing the feet apart. Bring the arms by the side of the ears. Give a good stretch to the abdominal muscles.



Then, bring the feet together, roll the inner thighs inwards, bring the big toes together, plantar flex the feet and give a good and long stretch.



Benefits:

Counters the contraction of the abdominal muscles gives a much needed toning
Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Relaxes the brain from all the contractions at the abs. Relieves muscles tension and cramping.
Relaxes the shoulders and the scapula.

14. Neck Roll

(Repetition: 3)

Introduction:

This exercise helps to counter the movements that we have done in the previous exercises. In the first of the back bend exercises, this helps relieve the pressure on the rectus abdominis, transversus abdominis, and the obliques. It helps to relieve the stress at the back of the neck and back muscles.

The muscles that are helps to move the neck are:

The sternocleidomastoid (SCM), which is the prominent muscle that runs from the ear to the front of the clavicle. This muscle enables you to turn your head and pull it forward.

The trapezius (traps), which is attached to the top of the spine at one end and to the shoulder blade at the other. This lifts the shoulder.

The levator scapulae (LS), which is attached to the vertebrae at the neck and to the shoulder blade. This stabilizes the shoulder blade, while the arm moves.

Starting Position:

- Lie on your stomach
- Peel your abs off the mat
- Tuck the tailbone under
- Place your hands under your shoulders
- Bring the elbows close to the body
- Move the shoulder blades down the back and closer to each other
- Head in neutral position



Exercise:

- Inhale, scoop firmly as you roll the nose upwards, and roll up (head, neck, upper back, mid back, lower back).



- Maintain normal breathing. Lengthen the chin and sternum toward the ceiling.
- Move and look to your left, roll the chin down to the chest, and then roll up to look to the right



- Return to the starting position lengthening the chin and sternum and looking towards the ceiling.
- Look to your right, roll the neck, look left, then centre
- Inhale and stay, exhale as you roll back down.
- Do a total of 3 sets.

For beginners, you may break down the exercise into smaller parts according to your own capability.

Modifications:

- For those with severe lordosis, proceed till pain permits.
- Breathe naturally while doing the neck movements.
- Omit the neck roll if you feel uncomfortable.
- Squeeze the butt muscles will help protect your lower spine.
- Sore shoulder or neck squeeze the shoulder blades till pain permits.
- For post-natal women, avoid until 6-8 weeks.



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is over arched, causing a strain in the lower back | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin is raised too much | Leave a small gap between the chin and the back of the neck, imagine there is a pen in between the space |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Wrists or elbows are opened to the sides | Lock the wrists and elbows, movement should come from the shoulders. |

Benefits:

- Stretches the muscles of the throat and abs.
- Works the shoulder stabilizer muscles.
- Counter stretch the spine.
- Neck tension leads to hunching of the shoulders overtime and may lead to headaches and back pain. Using and working the neck muscles helps to relieve tension and the associated problems.

15. Single Leg Kick

(Repetition 5 on each side)

Introduction:

The essence of Single Leg Kick is to work on the hamstrings (made of a group of muscles called biceps femoris, semitendinosus and semimembranosus). Practitioners should keep the abdominals away from the mat, pull the shoulders to the back and stabilize the shoulder blades. These actions are huge component of this exercise so that it is done effectively. Coordinated breathing is also vital part of this exercise.

Starting Position:

After completion of the neck roll, come on your elbows with the fingers forming into a fist and about 1 foot apart. Activate the inner thighs and hamstrings to keep the legs from opening too much apart.

Lift your upper body using the forearms. Keep your shoulders and scapula down, lift the sternum upwards. Elbows under the shoulders. Keep the neck long and extended by gazing down or very slightly forward.



Tuck the tailbone under toward the mat and pull your abdominals up away from the mat.

This will help to lengthen and protect the lower back. Working on the abdominals help to stabilize and to keep the powerhouse scooped.

Exercise:

Inhale and exhale and bend your right knee to a 90-degree angle. Keep the left leg extended on the mat.



Pulse two times (pushing gently down) towards the buttocks with the foot in plantar flex. Keep the buttocks engaged throughout.

Each time you pulse, use the breath by exhaling each time.

Keep gazing ahead all the time when you kick the heel back to the mat but not touching the mat.

Do this 5 times on each leg.

Keep the hamstrings engaged throughout the exercise to protect the knees and do not kick too hard. Take note to keep the knees together.

Imagine the legs crossing and creating a breeze when they past each other.

For beginners, you may break down the exercise into smaller parts according to your own capability.

Modifications:

Keep both palms on the mat if you find it difficult to form a fist.

Try doing this with both legs lifted off the floor slightly when they are extended

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Lower back is over arched, causing a strain in the lower back | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine and tuck the tailbone under |
| Not exhaling when pulsing towards the buttocks. | Focus the mind on the breath and the kicking |
| Neck is jammed and strained, chin lifted up too much | Keep the gaze straight ahead at the point |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Wrists or elbows are shifting to the sides | Lock the wrists and elbows, engage the pectoralis muscles |
| Feet not plantar flexed during the kick | Aim the heel to the buttock each time you pulse |

Benefits:

Strengthens the hamstrings and loosens the quadriceps

Build the strength in the arms and shoulder blades

Increases the endurance of the abs muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Builds mind and muscle coordination including motor abilities.

Gets the mind focused on multiple tasks and speed.

16. Double Leg Kick

(Repetition 5 on each side)

Introduction:

Double leg kick targets the back extensors and the hamstrings as well as stretch the front muscles such the rectus abdominis, pectoralis and deltoids. Coordination is very vital to performing this exercise effectively. This exercise is done after the Single Leg Kick.

Starting Position:

Lower your body from the single leg kick position and lie face down with your head turned to one side. Keep your legs together.

Bring your hands behind your back and move them upwards towards the upper back. Keep the elbows away from the floor. Lift the navel away from the mat and tuck the tailbone under.



Exercise:

Exhale with two short, pulsing breaths as you bend both knees, bringing your heels toward buttocks. Maintain neutral pelvis and keep the hips down.



Inhale and release legs so they are straight extended away from the body. At the same time lift the chest off mat.



Exhale, extend the spine and rotate neck to look over right shoulder.

Visualize lengthening spine.
Return to starting position and repeat other side.
Repeat this 5 times on each side.

Modifications:

1. Breakdown the kicks to low, medium and high speed as you progress in the exercise
2. Squeeze the shoulder blades at the back and support the shoulders
3. Place an exercise circle or a block in between the ankles to increase the intensity



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|--|---|
| Kick is not smooth and coordinated | Develop the kick into 3 levels of speed, low, medium and high. This technique helps to engage the hamstrings to pull the legs in and for good alignment |
| Hips moving away from the mat | Do not shake the body back and forth and keep the hips up by pulling the abs to the spine |
| Neck is hyperextended | Leave a small gap between the chin and the neck, imagine there is a lemon fruit in between the clavicle and chin |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Wrists or elbows are moving up and down | Lock the wrists and elbows and keep steady |
| Lower back arched too much | Keep the spine long and lengthen and stabilize the pubic bone on the mat |

Benefits:

Stretches the back of the legs and hamstrings

Prevents lower back injury and helps people with lower back problems.

Builds coordination and mind control

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus and rectus abdominal muscles.

17. Shell Stretch

(Repetition 1)

Introduction:

Cat stretch is one of the gentlest and simplest ways to stretch your back. After both the Single and Double leg kicks, this exercise would be a great relieve for the back. You see cats making this movement in the morning when they get up. It can done at any point during the workout

Starting Position:

To begin, get on all fours. Following up from the double leg kick, bring your torso down on the mat, press the palms firmly directly beneath the shoulders and raise the hips up. Align your hands beneath your shoulders knees beneath your hips. Allow your back to assume its neutral position. Align the cervical spine to neutral position.



Exercise:

Kneel on your mat.

Open the knees hip width apart.

Inhale and arch the back slightly, allowing the head to rise and you stick up and out.

Exhale and pull the navel in towards the spine and squeeze the lower back as a lumbar C Curve if formed, meaning that the lower back is curved and then continue rounding into the upper back.

Finally, allow the head to drop down.

At this point, the whole spine should be making a C.

The back should be rounded to the greatest extent possible

Push the arms into the mat for extra resistance while stretching the upper back.

Keep the abdominals and rib cage pulled in.

Think of using this pulling action to stretch through the whole spine.

Think of pulling your tail between the legs and rounding the back into a frightened kitty pose.

Inhale and return to neutral position

Repeat this another time.

Modifications:

If pain is felt at the ankles roll a towel or a mat and place it between the arch of the ankle and the mat to make it more comfortable

You can also place a bolster on the calf muscle to have added support.

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Not rounding the back and spine | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine |
| Holding of breath or not inhaling properly | Keep breathing steady |
| Wrists and shoulders are moving up and down | Relax the wrists and shoulders follow the movement |

Benefits:

Relaxes the back muscles

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Trains the body to develop a neutral spine



18. Side Kick Series

(Repetition 5 on each side)

Introduction:

The following series of exercises are excellent for toning, working the inner and outer thighs, strengthening the glutes, increases flexibility. It also works well for balance and symmetry. The usage of the powerhouse helps to stabilize the trunk as the lower body moves independently.

Starting Position:

Lie on your side at the back edge of the mat, elbow in line with the hips and the hips in line with feet up on the back of the mat. Support the side of the head with hand below and place the upper hand firmly on the mat in front of your chest, but do not support the whole weight on it. Use the abs.

Bring the legs forward to an angle of 45 degrees, and stack the shoulders, hips and ankles on top of each other respectively.

Dorsi-flex the lower ankle and press the foot firmly into the mat.

Keep the powerhouse engaged so as to stabilize the spine, hips and legs.

Exercise: Side Kick: Front and Back

Elevate the top leg a few inches in line with the hips. Dorsi-flex the foot and inhale kick the upper leg forwards with a 2 pulse movement.

Always lift the sternum and shoulder and hips should be equally stacked on top of each other.

Exhale keep length in the upper leg and through the whole body, point your toe and swing the top leg to the back stretching the front of the hip. Firm up the glutes.

Repeat these movements 5-10 times.

Only reach as far back as you can go without moving the pelvis. Use the core muscles.



Side Kick: Up and Down

Begin as per the previous side kicks front and back. Check the alignment again. Pull the abs inwards and towards the chest.

Rotate the upper leg such that the kneecap and the top of the foot face the roof.

Inhale and lengthening more kick up toward the ceiling without changing the hips placement and do not collapse the chest.

Keep the hip bones stacked. Make sure that the pelvis does not tilt back to let the leg go up.

Exhale and lower the leg with control to the bottom leg.

Repeat this 5-10 times.

**Side Kick: Circles**

Begin as per the previous side kicks front and back. Check the alignment again. Pull the abs inwards and towards the chest.

Lift the top leg, hip height, keep the shoulder and hips stacked.

Rotate the upper leg swiftly close to the bottom leg and in small circles.

Repeat this in the opposite direction

Repeat this 5-10 times on each side

**Side Kick: Single Leg Lifts**

Begin as per the previous side kicks front and back. Check the alignment again. Pull the abs inwards and towards the chest.

Lift the top leg about 1 to 2 feet away from the bottom leg and do not lean backwards. Exhale, lift the bottom leg to meet the top leg.

Keep the angle of the body and the feet, shoulders and hips should be stacked.

Do not move the upper leg and lower the bottom leg down to the mat. Lift and lower for 5-10 times. Work the glutes.

Modifications:

Modify this exercise by placing the hands at the back of the head.

Increase the challenge by holding at the top of the leg for several breaths.



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Lower back is over arched, causing a strain in the lower back | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine |
| Hips and shoulders rolling forward | Keep neck and shoulders relaxed and head look forward |
| Leg lifting too high for side kick front and back | Maintain hip width distance to be effective. Use the inner thigh muscles to maintain the width. |
| Chest collapsed, shoulders are moving forward | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Shrugging the shoulders | Maintain the alignment by engaging the back muscles |
| Upper leg rotating inwards and down | Activate the gluteus to maintain the rotation |
| Knees are separated for single leg lifts | Contract the inner thighs and obliques to draw the knees together |

Benefits:

Warm up the body

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Trains the body about imprinted position

19. Teaser Prep

(Repetition 5 on each side)

Introduction:

Teaser is an exercise that challenges anybody and is a fast and quick way to flatten the abdominal-pelvic region and to strengthen the powerhouse. It should be performed with control and sleekly. In the teaser prep, we perform it with one leg first. As we progress, we can perform it with both legs extended.

Starting Position:

From the side kicks series, turn and lie on the back with the knees at a 45 degree angle and feet flat on the mat.

Place the arms by the side of the body, palms facing down.

Maintain neutral alignment with the floor and relax the shoulders.

Inhale and straighten one leg to a 45 degree angle from the floor.

Keep the ribcage down and reach the arms and fingers towards the toes.



Exercise:

Inhale bring the arms over the head as you bring the chin towards the sternum

Roll the upper back off the mat using the abs and the transverses by articulating from the spine.

Engage the shoulders and bring it down and the scapula towards the back. Slowly reach towards the toes. Feel that there is a hook attached to the abs and pulling the back up towards to meet the toes.

Hold for 1 breath and then

Exhale, round the back and roll down from the lower abs by articulating the spine with full control of the body to bring the back down.

When you come down the arms will go back over head.

Keep the shoulders down always and do not pop the ribs.



Modifications:

Keep both feet on the ground in a pelvis-neutral position instead of straight leg at 45 degrees.



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Jerking the shoulders forward and up | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine and maintain an imprinted position to pull yourself up |
| Bending the knee | Work and engage the leg muscles to maintain a straight knee |
| Throwing the arms forward to help in the movement up | Form a C-curve with the lower back when you come up |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Upper body is extended too much, causing the rectus abs to pop up | Lower the upper body down slightly, focus on working the transversus ab rather than the rectus ab. |

Benefits:

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Fires up the rectus abdominis and obliques when you concentrically roll up.

Hip flexors maintain the length of the leg throughout the exercise

Improves the flexibility of the spine

20. Teaser Beginner

(Repetition 5)

Introduction:

The teaser for beginner increases the strength and challenges the body when you lift the torso and get into a balanced position in a V-shape.

Starting Position:

Continuing from the Teaser prep series

Place the arms by the side of the body, palms facing down.

Maintain neutral alignment with the floor and relax the shoulders.

Inhale and straighten both legs to a 45 degree angle from the floor.

Keep the ribcage down.



Exercise:

Extend the spine up long and straight and allow your arms to relax at your sides.

Engage the abdominal muscles as you inhale and lift the arms up and back above the head.

Exhale and lift the torso and legs to center position.

Inhale and exhale and swing the arms towards the center, lift the body into a "V" position.

Always make sure scapula is stabilized.

The legs should end up straight and lifted at about 45 degrees and the palms of the hands should end up above the knees fingers pointing towards the ceiling.

Inhale and relax the legs back to the floor.

Simultaneously, continue rolling the spine sequentially back to the mat.

Bring the arms back above the head.

Use the abdominal muscles to lift the legs and torso, instead of using the momentum of the swing or other movements.

Repeat this 5 times before relaxing the arms and legs to the floor and relaxing.

Modifications:

Maintaining the “V”-position, raise and lower the legs towards the mat and away from the mat

Maintaining the “V”-position, reach arms to the respective sides in a circular motion.

| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Jerking the shoulders forward and up | Engage the abdominal muscles, bring the navel to spine and maintain an imprinted position to pull yourself up |
| Bending the knee | Work and engage the leg muscles to maintain a straight knee |
| Throwing the arms forward to help in the movement up | Form a slight C-curve with the lower back when you come up |
| Chest is collapsed, shoulders are shrugged | Engage the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder blades and draw them down and back. |
| Upper body is extended too much, causing the rectus abs to pop up | Lower the upper body down slightly, focus on working the transversus abs rather than the rectus abs. |

**Benefits:**

See teaser prep.

21. Push Ups

(Repetition 5)

Introduction:

Push-ups involve the whole body. This exercise works the pectoral muscles and maintains stability of the torso and pelvis. It is a good exercise to develop strength in the arms

Starting Position:

From the Teaser position, stand up and come to the top of the mat, feet together, scapula pinched to the back and downwards, arms by the side of the body. Push the abs towards the back of the spine and tuck the tail bone under.

Exercise:

Inhale, raise the arms over the head and keep the shoulders down.

Exhale, sequentially articulate the spine by flexing the chin towards the collar bone and allow the arms as you nod the head and begin to roll down toward the mat.

When rolling down, pull the abs in and curve the spine.

Inhale, walk the hands away from the feet in three big steps until plank pose.

Inhale, lower the body in a straight line by bending the elbows and keeping it straight back along the sides so that the arms touch the side of the body.

Exhale, keep the abs towards the spine and extend the elbows and raise the body up away from the mat in one straight line.

Inhale, walk the hands back to the forward bend position.

Exhale, articulate the spine vertebrae by vertebrae from the tail bone to neutral standing position.

Use the abdominals to move the pelvis to the upright position.

Inhale to lift the arms and repeat this exercise five times.





Modifications:

Keep both knees on the ground in a pelvis-neutral position and continue to do the push ups. While in push up position in a long straight line, raise one leg to the back by engaging the gluteus muscles.

Keep the knees bent when coming into forward bent position if the hamstrings are very tight.



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Pelvis rocking when walking the hands away and to the feet | Keep the pelvis lifted. Use abdominals to deeply pull in and move toward rolling up. |
| Shoulder blades not stabilized and popped | As you lower the body toward the mat, keep the shoulder blades pinched at the back |
| Shoulders coming close to the ears | Pull the shoulders down by engaging the deltoids and rotator cuff muscles |
| Hyper extension of the elbow joint | Rotate the arms so that the eye of the elbow faces forward. This stabilizes the shoulder blades and prepares the arm movement back and forth |
| Inner thighs not together | Engage the inner thigh muscles to stabilize the pelvis during movement |
| Upper body is flexed up too much, causing the rectus ab to pop up | Lower the upper body down slightly, focus on working the transversus ab rather than the rectus ab. |

Benefits:

Strengthens the rotator cuff, the group of four muscles (supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis) that form a cuff around the humerus (upper arm bone) and hold it in the socket at the shoulder.

Strengthens the abdominal muscles

Increases the endurance of the core muscles, especially the transversus abdominal muscles.

Push up is done with the elbows kept by the sides of the body instead of allowing them to move away.

Chapter 7 Cool Down

The last series of exercises is to stretch the muscles to create a balance in the whole body. Be relaxed and breathe slowly while doing this.

1. Neck Release

Stand tall. As you exhale, tilt the head to the left side, use the left hand to hold the right side of the head and gently press towards the left shoulder.

Hold for 10-15 seconds.

Repeat with the other side.



2. Standing backbend

Stand tall. Place the hands on the buttocks, with chest open and shoulders rolled back. Engage the buttocks and abs, inhale and bend backwards. Careful not to drop the head back.

Hold for 5 seconds and repeat once more.



3. Spine lateral flexion

Stand tall. Inhale, raise the right arm up. Exhale, bend the body to the left side, reaching the right arm to the right and slide the left hand lower down the leg.

Hold for 10-15 seconds.

Repeat with the other side.



4. Chest opener

Stand tall. Interlock the fingers behind. Inhale, raise the arms up and pull the shoulders back.

Hold for 10-15 seconds.



5. Standing quad stretch

Stand tall. Bend the right knee and bring the heel towards the right buttock. Keep the knees together, tailbone tucked under and balance with the other leg.

Hold for 10-15 seconds.

Repeat with the other side.



Tirisula Yoga

Pilates Intermediate Exercises

Supplementary notes for Pilates Instructor
Course



[2009]

Intermediate Routine

- | | |
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| 1. The Hundred | 17. Neck Roll |
| 2. Roll up and down | 18. Swan dive |
| 3. Roll over | 19. Single leg kick |
| 4. Single leg circles | 20. Double leg kick |
| 5. Rolling like a ball | 21. Shell Stretch |
| 6. Stomach Series: Single leg stretch | 22. Neck pull |
| 7. Stomach Series: Double leg stretch | 23. Shoulder bridge |
| 8. Stomach Series: Single leg straight | 24. Side kick series |
| 9. Stomach Series: Double leg straight | 25. Teaser Prep |
| 10. Stomach Series: Obliques | 26. Teaser Beginner |
| 11. Spine stretch forward | 27. Swimming |
| 12. Open leg rocker | 28. Leg pull down |
| 13. Double leg circles (Cock-screw) | 29. Side bend |
| 14. Saw | 30. Seal |
| 15. Spinal twist | 31. Push Ups |
| 16. Supine stretch | |

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Roll Over

(Repetition: 6 to 10 times)

Introduction

This is the reverse of the roll up and down in the beginners' routine. In the roll up and down, the movement is initiated from the top of the abdominal muscles while in this exercise, the movement is initiated from the lower part of the abs. This is an excellent exercise to learn how to control the articulation of the spine and it should be done slowly, instead of swinging the legs.

Starting position

Lie on the back, hands by the side of the body, both legs together perpendicular to the floor with knees straight. Neck in neutral position, ankles plantar-flexed

Exercise

Inhale, initiate the movement from the lower abdominal muscles, raise your hips and roll through the imprinted position. Keep the hands on the floor at all times during the exercise.

Exhale, bring your legs parallel to the floor, or if possible, feet gently touching the floor with ankles plantar flexed. Keep a small gap between the neck and the chest.

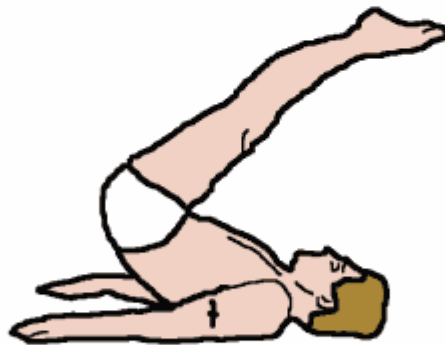
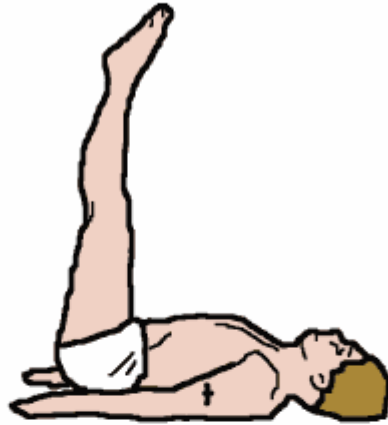
Inhale, open the legs to hip width apart

Exhale, while keeping the legs hip width apart, roll down the body by articulating the spine, controlling from the top to the bottom, until the hips touch the floor. Roll down evenly on both sides of the back with control.

Lower the legs to about 45 degrees, while keeping a pelvic-imprinted position and close the legs.

Repeat 3 to 5 times.

After which, repeat the exercise for another 3 to 5 times by alternating the position of the legs. Start the Roll Over with legs apart and legs together while rolling down.



Modifications

For an easier modification, start and end the legs at 90 degrees instead of 45 degrees.

For a stiff back, keep the legs parallel to the floor.

To increase the difficulty level, start the legs at 45 degrees angle or lower instead of 90 degrees.

Add a block between the legs

Add a circle between the legs

Add ankle weights

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|--|--|
| Rolling too fast with speed and momentum | Slow down and do the movement with control |
| Neck is jammed | Leave a gap between the chin and chest |
| Weight is on the neck or head when legs are over | Weight should be on the shoulder blades |
| Toes are anchored on the floor when legs are over, with weight on the toes | Plantar flex the ankle, soles of the feet facing up, toe-nails on the floor with very slight weight on them, use the powerhouse to control instead |
| While rolling down, distance between the legs and body changes | Keep the same distance between the legs and body while descending |
| Jerky movement and flat back while moving up and down | Roll through imprint, flex each of the vertebrae with control and articulate the spine while moving |
| Knees are bent | Straighten the knees by engaging the quadriceps slightly and lengthen the hamstrings |

Benefits

- ü Tones the powerhouse, especially the lower abs during initiation of the movement through imprint
- ü Improves concentration by focusing on the coordination between eccentric and concentric contractions of the abdominal muscles and the back muscles during rolling
- ü Articulate the spine, beneficial for flat back
- ü Stretches the entire back, beneficial for lordosis
- ü Improves blood circulation

Open Leg Rocker

(Repetition: 5 – 8 times)

Introduction

This is a more challenging exercise which uses similar technique and principles as compared to the Rolling like a ball. Instead of bent knees, here the legs are straightened which increases the intensity. To perform this exercise correctly and to reap maximum benefits, the shape and alignment of the body should be maintained throughout. Breath control is also a key factor in Open Leg Rocker.

Starting position

Sit on the mat, hold on to the ankles and raise the legs up with knees straight. Keep the legs hip width apart. Make sure you are sitting on the sit bones and not tail bone. Depress the scapular and keep the neck long. Keep the belly scooped in.



Exercise

Inhale, form a C-curve by curling the tailbone under and flex the lumbar vertebrae to initiate the rolling back movement. Keep the hands on the ankles without changing its grip throughout the exercise. Roll on till the scapulae.

Exhale, come back up by scooping the belly in and balance at the starting position.

Repeat for 5 to 8 times.

Modifications

For an easier modification, hold onto the calves instead.

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Rocking too fast | Keep a rhythm in the mind and follow the inhale and exhale |
| Bending the knees to get up | Keep the knees straight and hands locked on the ankles |

Benefits

- ü Tones the powerhouse
- ü Improves balance and control
- ü Works on the coordination of the breath and movement
- ü Massages the back and spine

Double Leg Circles

(Repetition: 3-5 times)

Introduction

This is an intermediate version to Single Leg Circles as practiced in the Beginners' Routine. The advanced version is commonly called the 'Cock-screw'. The key thing in this exercise is to keep the upper body and hips stable while moving the legs in circular movements in the air.

Starting position

Lie on the back with arms by the side of the body, palms facing down. Bring the legs up perpendicular to the floor with knees straight. Keep the pelvis in an imprinted position throughout the exercise. Plantar flex the ankles. Lengthen the neck and press the scapulars down against the mat.



Exercise

Inhale, start with clockwise movement and circle both legs to the right. Keep the legs straight and inner thighs squeezed together to maintain the legs active.

Exhale, circle the legs back to starting position with hips on the ground at all times.

Do for 3 to 5 times and repeat for anti-clockwise circles, 3 to 5 times.

Start with small circles first and until you get more comfortable, challenge yourself with bigger circles.

Modifications

For easier modification, draw smaller circles first

To increase the challenge, draw bigger circles, or add weights by putting a circle or block between the ankles.

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|--|---|
| Knees are bent, legs are 'dull' and relaxed, legs are not together | Engage the leg muscles and straighten the knees to keep the legs active |
| Lumbar is arched up, belly popping out | Use the powerhouse to maintain a pelvis-imprinted position |
| Neck is dropped back (hyper-extended) | Tuck the chin slightly and maintain a neutral cervical position |

Benefits

- ü Strengthen the lower abdominal muscles
- ü Tones the leg muscles (quadriceps, adductors and abductors)
- ü Challenges the powerhouse (transversus ab, obliques and rectus ab)

Swan Dive

(Repetition: 5 – 8 times)

Introduction

This is one of the few Pilates exercises which involve a hyperextension of the spine. It is a complimentary movement to all the forward flexions. Forward flexions strengthen mainly the abdominal region and this backward extension works on the back muscles, especially on the erector spinae. Be careful to take note that during the “Rock and catch” movements, the alignment and shape of the body should remain unchanged from the starting position.

Starting Position

Lie on the belly with neutral spine, tummy tucked in. Place the palms down on the mat in line with the ears. Inhale, raise the chest and upper body up by contracting the back and erector spinae muscles with the support of the arms. Keep the scapulae depressed. Lengthen the spine in extension.

Exercise

Exhale, rock forward with arms extended, initiate the movement by reaching the legs high up in the air, ankles plantar flexed.

Inhale, rock back into starting position and take support with the palms on the mat

Repeat this ‘Rock and catch’ action for 5 to 8 times.

Modifications

For easier modification, instead of releasing and extending the hands, keep the palms on the floor as in starting position, practice rocking the body forward and back.

For those with tight backs, hold on the starting position for isometric contraction and allow time for the spine to do hyperextension.

For a more challenging modification, instead of ‘rock and catch’, continue the rocking movement forward and back 5 to 8 times, without taking support with the palms. Keep the hands extended throughout the exercise.



| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Scapulae elevated. | Depress and stabilize the scapulae by engaging the lower trapezius muscles |
| Too much hyperextension of the spine | Keep the pelvic floor muscles and transverses abdominal muscles engaged throughout the exercise |

Benefits

- ü Strengthen the erector spinae muscles
- ü Engage the transverses abdominal muscles to avoid overarching the lower back
- ü Improves flexibility of the spine
- ü Massages the abdominal internal organs
- ü Works on the coordination of the abdominal muscles and the lower back, together with the breath.

Neck Pull

(Repetition: 5 – 8 times)

Introduction

This is similar to the previous exercise in the Beginners' Routine, the Roll Up, with slight modification to the arms position. This requires more control and coordination of the core muscles and pay attention not to overuse the hip flexors while coming up.

Starting position

Lie on the back in a lumbo-pelvic neutral position, ankles dorsi-flexed to anchor the legs down. Bring the hands behind the head, with elbows wide.

Exercise

Inhale, start with a slight chin-nod and flex the cervical vertebrae, roll up by articulating the spine.

Exhale, keep the rolling up movement smooth and controlled, continue to flex up the thoracic and lumbar spine to a forward bend position

Inhale, stack up the spine

Exhale, initiate from the pelvis and roll down sequentially.

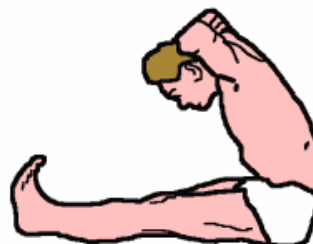
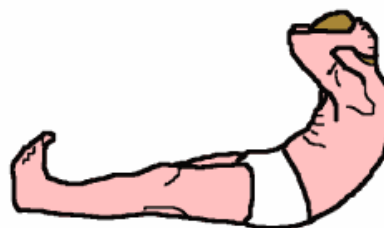
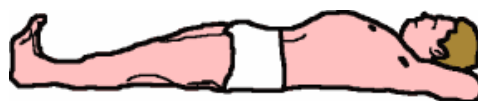
Go back to starting position with the pelvis neutral

Repeat the exercise 5 to 8 times

Modifications

For a simpler modification, start in a sitting position with knees flexed. Hands supporting the head, exhale, roll down halfway by initiating with a C-curve. Inhale to stay. Exhale, roll up again.

Another modification is to do the exercise with knees flexed.



| Common mistakes | Corrections |
|---|---|
| Jerking up and using the hip flexors and quadriceps muscles | Keep flexing the spine by forceful exhalation to stabilize the ribs and engage the transverses abdominals. Perform the C-curve to prevent overworking the hip flexors |
| Tensing up the upper trapezius muscles | Relax the upper trapezius and neck, engage the lower trapezius more instead |
| Using arm strength to pull the neck up, crunching the neck | Relax the arms and open the elbows. Stabilize the scapulae. |

Benefits

- ü Articulates the spine
- ü Tones the transverses and rectus abdominals, obliques
- ü Works on the pelvic floor muscles

Shoulder Bridge

(Repetition: 3-4 repetitions on each side)

Introduction

Shoulder bridge is an intermediate exercise that helps to strengthen the abdominal muscles and stabilizes the lumbar pelvic region by engaging the deep pelvic floor muscles due to the leg which moves with every leg lift. The back is resting on the scapula forming a bridge from the scapula to the knees. The bridge has numerous benefits including a toned backside, flat stomach and healthy back. It can be performed virtually anywhere. Learn the bridge in these easy steps.

Starting position

Lie on the back, hands by the side of the body, knees flexed with the feet on the mat. Neck in neutral position, spine in neutral with ankles slightly plantar-flexed.

Exercise

Inhale as you lengthen through the spine, and as you exhale press down on your feet, stabilize the pelvis and extend the hips to raise the pelvis away from the mat. This will create a bridge position as the rectus abdominis and obliques will ensure there is no pelvic tilt.

Inhale, maintain the pelvis position and raise one leg by bending one knee in toward your chest and then extending the knee and pointing the toes towards the ceiling. The rest of the body is stabilized.

Exhale, change the foot to dorsiflex and lower the leg back to the level of the hip. When you lower the leg you need to feel that the leg and the head are moving in opposite direction as you reach and extend the leg back to the back to the hip level.

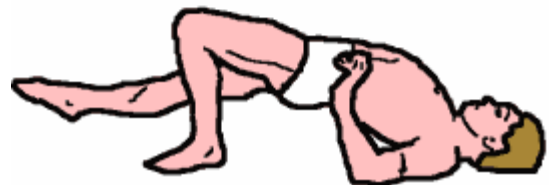
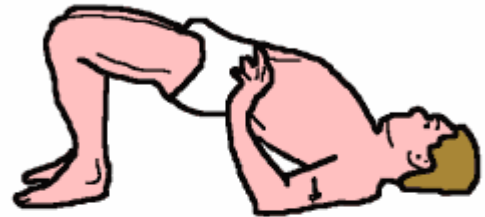
Inhale, plantar-flex the foot and raise the leg up towards the ceiling again. Ensure that the hips are stabilized rather than tilted to one side.

Repeat this movement of extending and flexing of the hip once more.

Exhale, plantar flex the foot, bend the knee back towards the chest and return the foot to the mat beside the other leg.

Continue with 3 or 4 repetitions on each side.

Inhale, to lengthen through the spine and exhale, stabilize spine and pelvis as you move the hips down to the mat.



Modifications

For starters, it will be advisable just to practice lifting and lowering of the hips to strengthen the core, gluteus maximus and the hamstrings.

To practice lifting of leg with toes pointing towards the ceiling, just raise the pelvis to neutral off the mat, lift and lower one leg as you alternate between the legs.

To increase the difficulty level:

Add a block between the legs

Add a circle between the legs

Add ankle weights

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|--|--|
| Resting on the cervical spine | The lift should be only up to the upper thoracic region |
| Lifting the hips too high | Maintain contraction of obliques to avoid hyperextension of the lumbar spine |
| Weight is on the neck or head when the feet is too close to the buttocks | Weight should be on the shoulder blades by moving the feet away slightly |
| Moving the pelvis away from neutral during the up and down movement of the leg | Stabilize spine and pelvis by contracting the lumbo-pelvic muscles |
| Knees open laterally while in the starting position | Engage the inner thigh muscles and the gluteus minimus and medius to adduct the legs |
| Hips not fully extended | Engage the gluteus maximus and hamstrings |

Benefits

- ü Increases strength of the powerhouse while holding the bridge position isometrically
- ü Improves flexibility of the hamstring muscles during the leg up and down movement
- ü The multifidus muscle gets a good workout while holding the spine in a bridge position
- ü The muscles of the scapula work isometrically to stabilize it
- ü Improves blood circulation to the head and relieves varicose veins
- ü Improves focus and coordination of the hips and feet

Swimming

(Repetition: 3-5 repetitions for every inhale and exhale)

Introduction

Swimming is an excellent counter exercise for most of the pilates moves. It can be quite fun and tests the coordination skills between the arms and the legs. Most people find this exercise relieving for the anterior muscles as it works every part of the body.

Starting position

Lie on the tummy, with the pelvis and spine in neutral. Extend the legs, hip distance apart with the ankles in plantar flex flat on the mat. Extend the arms parallel to the mat, shoulder width apart with the palms facing downwards while you stabilize the scapula.

Exercise

Inhale and as you exhale, suck in the abs, extend the arms and legs away from the mat while lifting the bellybutton up.

Try to lengthen the spine as the head moves away from the mat. Keep the cervical neutral all the time.

Inhale for 5 counts and alternate right arm/left leg, then left arm/right leg, moving them up and down in small pulses.

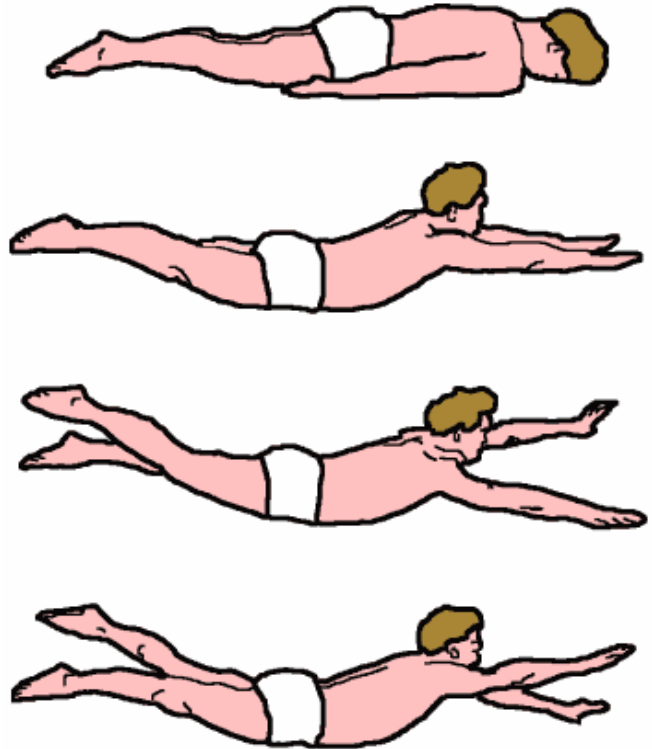
Repeat this movement as you exhale for 5 counts

You should be able to imitate the swimming movement.

Repeat this movement 3-4 times.

Modifications

- ü For starters, it will be advisable just to practice lifting and lowering of the arms and legs alternately to achieve the coordination.
- ü To practice lifting of leg with toes pointing backwards, arms pointing forward as you raise the head.
- ü To increase the difficulty level add ankle and wrist weights



| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|--|--|
| Unable to coordinate the arms and legs in alternate fashion | Perform the exercise in slow motion initially and increase the speed to follow the breathing gradually |
| Rocking the body left and right while moving the arms and the legs | Maintain and stabilize the scapula and suck in the abs and transverses abdominis to minimize movement and avoid overusing the trapezius. |
| Hyperextending the cervical spine | Engage neck muscles to stabilize the cervical in neutral position |
| Palms and feet touching the mat while swimming | Movement should be controlled by using the deltoids, traps, flexors and hamstrings |
| Breathing uneven | Do not focus on the breathing first, get the movements smoothen out while maintain the level and degree of extension |

Benefits

- ü Increases strength of the powerhouse while holding the position isometrically
- ü Improves flexibility of the hamstring muscles during the leg up and down movement
- ü The erector spinae at the thoracic region get strengthened
- ü The obliques works to prevent tilting
- ü The muscles of the scapula works isometrically to stabilize it
- ü Improves flexibility of the traps and latissimus dorsi
- ü Improves focus and coordination of the arms and feet

Leg Pull Front

(Repetition: 4-6 repetitions on each side)

Introduction

In Pilates, the swimming precedes the Leg Pull Front. This exercise challenges the core strength and the shoulder girdle muscles. Alternating between the lifting of legs challenges the stability of the torso and targets the deep muscles of the abdomen and spine. This exercise done regularly helps in the ability to do Push-Ups.

Starting position

Lie prone position, place hands by the side of the shoulders, toes and ball of the feet pointing down on the mat. Neck in neutral position, spine in neutral with ankles slightly dorsi-flexed. Extend the arms at the elbow but not locking the elbows. The hands need to be directly below the shoulders. When checking the position, there should be a straight line that goes from the head, to the shoulders, the hips and the feet. This position should be maintained throughout the exercise. Do not drop the abdominals during this exercise.

Exercise

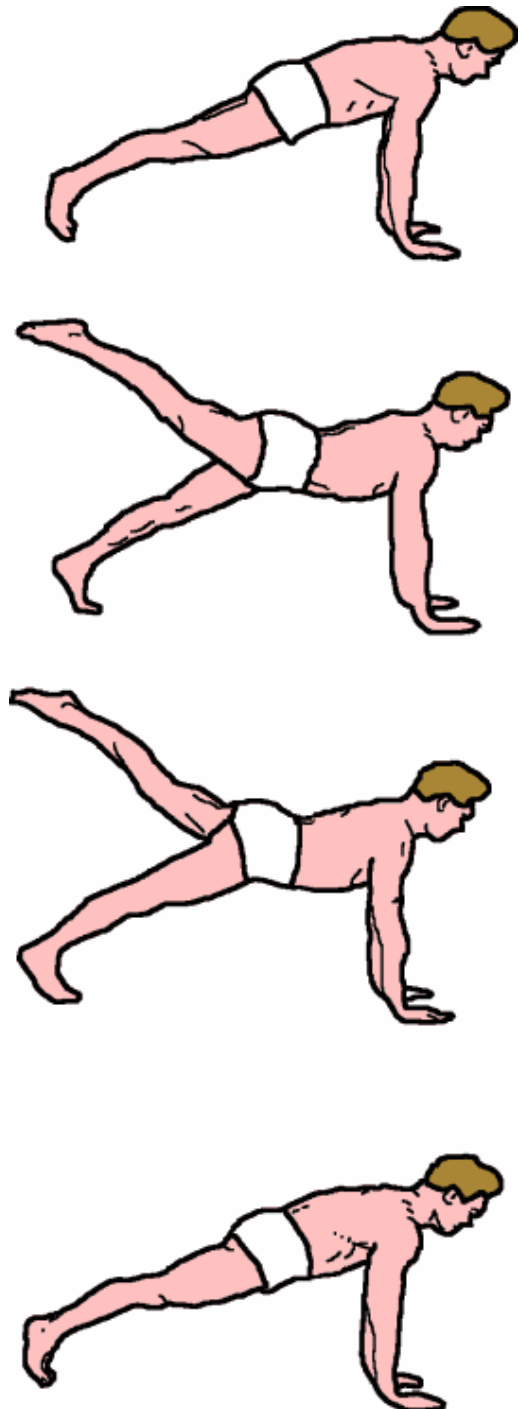
Inhale as you lengthen through the spine, lift one leg off the mat. Reach the foot as high as possible without collapsing the other hip and point the toes downwards. The only part of the body that moves is the leg and hip of the side that lifts. Focus on keeping the entire body still and stable from the time the toe comes off the mat.

Exhale, move the body back at the shoulders while engaging the plantar flex at the ankle. Maintain the hip extension while doing this movement.

Inhale, slowly move the body forward with the shoulders coming directly above the hands. Return the ankle to dorsi-flex at the same time.

Exhale, lower the leg back to the mat on the ball of the feet using the core and legs to keep the movement controlled and smooth.

Repeat this exercise 4-6 times on each and alternating between both legs each time.



Modifications

For starters, it will be advisable just to practice lifting and lowering of the hips to strengthen the core, shoulders and pelvis

To practice with a slight bend at the knees

To practice lifting of leg with toes pointing backwards, just raise the pelvis to neutral off the mat, lift and lower one leg as you alternate between the legs.

Exclude the movement back and forth at the shoulders

To increase the difficulty level:

Add ankle weights

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Shrugging of the shoulders | Stabilize the shoulder blades by retracting and depressing towards the small of the back |
| Pelvis sinking or lifting away from the neutral position | Engage the lumbo-pelvic muscles, transverses and rectus abdominis |
| Pelvis tilting to one side performing leg lifts | Engage the obliques and multifidus to prevent rotation of the pelvis |
| Protraction of the shoulder blades | Keep the elbows close to the sides of the body and depress the scapula |
| Knees open laterally while in the starting position | Engage the inner thigh muscles and the gluteus minimus and medius to adduct the legs |
| Not able to coordinate the flexing of the ankle while moving forward and backward | Skip the flexing and practice the movements only |

Benefits

- ü Increases strength of the powerhouse while holding the plank position isometrically
- ü Improves strength of the hamstring muscles during the leg up and down movement
- ü The multifidus muscle gets a good workout while holding the spine in a plank position
- ü Sends energy from the pelvis to the shoulders down to feet again
- ü Improves focus and coordination of the shoulders and feet

Side Bend

(Repetition: 3-6 repetitions on each side)

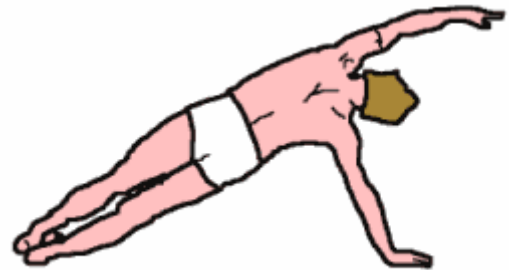
Introduction

The Side Bend enhances lateral mobility of the spine and stretches the obliques. It primarily targets the transversus abdominis, obliques and scapular stabilizers. This really works the upper body. Need to ensure that you do not have any wrist issues or shoulder issues.



Starting position

With your knees bent, sit on one side of the hip and leg. Place the left foot flat on the mat behind the right ankle. Place your right hand with the palm facing down in line with the right hip and reach the left arm, elbow very slightly bent, parallel to the ground, bringing the left wrist just past your left knee with palms facing upwards.



Exercise

Inhale, engage the core muscles and press down through the right hand to lift the pelvis into a side bend, laterally bending the torso and extend the knees and bringing the left arm up over your left ear at the top of the movement.

Focus the eyes straight ahead

Exhale, simultaneously pivot the torso, legs and feet clockwise; draw your hips down and back; and reach the left arm across the front of the torso.

You should feel a line of energy from the right palm up through the right shoulder and out through the torso and right sitting bone. Most of your body weight will rest on the right foot; the left foot only supports.

Continue with 3 to 6 repetitions on each side.

Modifications

For starters, it will be advisable just to practice lifting and lowering of the hips with one knee on the mat

To practice lifting with the legs further from the body and less lateral flexion

To increase the difficulty level, bring the feet closer to the body to increase lateral flexion

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Contracting the rib cage | Engage the abdominals |
| Hips moving backwards or forward too much | Engage abs, gluteus |
| Dropping the neck too much | Keep the cervical long and extended |
| Putting too much weight on the shoulder that it sinks | Distribute the weight throughout the body |
| Knees open laterally while in the lateral flex position | Engage the inner thigh muscles and the gluteus minimus and medius to adduct the legs |
| Hips not fully extended | Engage the gluteus maximus and hamstrings |

Benefits

- ü Gives good workout for the obliques as most of the pilates move tend to be forward bends and back bends
- ü Increases strength of the powerhouse while holding the position isometrically
- ü Improves flexibility of the hamstring muscles during the up and down movement
- ü The multifidus muscle gets a good workout while holding the spine in this position
- ü The muscles of the scapula works isometrically to stabilize it
- ü Improves blood circulation to the head
- ü Improves focus and coordination of the hips and feet
- ü Improves the digestive system

Seal

(Repetition: 10 repetitions)

Introduction

Seal, similar to the rolling like a ball, works on creating balance and control while maintaining rhythmic movement with the breath. One should not depend on the momentum to create the movement but rather use the core, powerhouse muscles.

Starting position

Sit on the sit bones with a slight flexion in a tight ball shape at the front edge of a mat. Bring the soles of the feet together with the knees bent and legs abducted and hips laterally rotated. Reach the hands inside your thighs and grasp the outside of the ankles. Stabilize the shoulder blades and bring the chin toward the chest. Hover the feet away from the mat.



Exercise

Inhale, holding the C-curve, roll back onto the scapula without touching the head on the mat. While holding this position, clap the soles of your feet together like a seal flipper 3 times.

Exhale, contract the abs as you roll back up to hover in the original position and clap 3 times.

Repeat the exercise 10 times.

Modifications

For starters, it will be advisable just to practice lifting and lowering of the feet to strengthen the core and maintaining the C-curve.

Avoid the clapping or clap 1 time

Hold outside of the legs

To increase the difficulty level:

Add ankle weights

| Common Mistakes | Corrections |
|---|--|
| Not maintaining the C-curve | Flex the thoracic region by contraction the abs |
| Unable to lift the legs away from the mat | Use the abductors |
| Weight is on the neck or head when the roll back is performed | Weight should be on the shoulder blades by maintaining the rhythm |
| Overusing the hip flexors | Stabilize spine and pelvis by contracting the lumbo-pelvic muscles |
| Unable to slide the hands through the legs | Try one by one |

Benefits

- ü Increases strength of the powerhouse while holding the starting position
- ü Improves flexibility and coordination of the dynamic movements
- ü The muscles of the scapula work isometrically to stabilize by protraction
- ü Improves blood circulation to the head and relieves varicose veins
- ü Improves focus and coordination of the hips, feet and rolling motion