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### **What is Pilates?**

The short answer is "corrective exercise". The long answer is this amazing odyssey across the history of Europe and The USA. This is the shortest I can make it. The mat work came first, Mr. Pilates (JHP) actually made a living off of just that until a situation involving people who were too weak to do his movements forced him to incorporate springs to assist them. The machines evolved from there. By the end of WWII Tuberculosis had created a group of people with breathing difficulties and Mr. Pilates spent some time with them honing his understanding of the mechanics of breath before the world of Ballet took over. By now, Pilates had become a system of refining as well as improving body mechanics. It was a natural marriage, Pilates and Dance. The marriage lasted until Oprah created the new age of Pilates much as Quentin Tarantino did for John Travolta.

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### **What are the benefits of Pilates?**

I'll try to take them in layers. The absolute pinnacle of benefits is simply the choice to pay more attention to one's own body posture. Much of our most challenging pains come from having ignored something for too long. Half the battle is not making stuff worse and that's cake when we develop the habit of feeling our

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posture. It is for this reason that 1 hour of Pilates can sometimes change a person's life. So, dodging or minimizing a phat list of spinal degeneration disorders is the 1st layer. As for the second layer of benefits, as a physical adult I derive a lot of real comfort knowing that some of my decline is reversible, not all of my aches and pains are inevitable, and in general, that some age-related problems can be fixed. Thoughts like that keep me warm at night. Yeah, but what about right now? Actually, the benefits of Pilates come really fast. The now fossilized old cliché "In ten sessions you'll feel the difference, in 20 sessions you'll see the difference, and in 30 sessions you'll have a whole new body!" is not so crazy. 10 sessions is ample time to teach good breathing skills that feed into postural improvement which then feed back into breath volume capacity. It's a tidy loop. More oxygen in the blood stream means some systems can work less hard and others benefit. Everything you love about yourself (strength, speed, memory, cleverness, even compassion) can be enhanced by more O's in the stream. Strong, consistent breath habits are raw horsepower for free.

20 (focused) sessions is enough to take it to the next level. While each individual Pilates exercise is therapeutic in its own way, there is a hard won synergy that comes from doing many of them in a row. By your 20th session you could have learned enough Pilates to spend a whole hour doing nothing but Pilates. Constant movement, constant engagement, constant breath. At this level ( not so easy ) people's bodies change fast.

The 30 session/whole new body thing ... well, a newly well aligned and tempered body, fueled by a newly increased VO2 max with (literally) new shock absorbers is close enough for me. I've gone pretty far around the block to say that Pilates can make you look and feel younger. Its true.

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### **Pilates Mat or Equipment?**

Both have their virtues. Mat is less expensive and easier to find, while machine teachers tend to be more well rounded and experienced. Remember that the mat came first and understanding it is really the best place to begin a study of Pilates as a whole. The machines came later and enhanced the study of people and their progress. If a client has special needs or specific goals, the

machines are indispensable. They are great tools and I can teach faster and more efficiently with them. The advance reformer in all its difficulty and complexity offers something close to the founders vision of a universal tool kit for physical superiority. Maybe most impressive and demonstrative of Mr. Pilates degree of Study is how intricately the various machines support each other and especially the mat. If a client is having trouble with a particular mat move, chances are Mr. Pilates has already conceived of a path on the machines that will help. To sum up, quality of teachers is most important. Mat allows you to quality shop til you find a good one. Machines can let you focus your time very well. Choose wisely.

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### **What age groups can do Pilates?**

The bottom limit on age probably has more to do with comprehension than ability. Many of the exercises bring us into competition with some of our worst physical habits. For instance, hundreds tends to make a body want to hunch, jut, and arch different parts of their spine. A person is "old enough" when they can sustain an opinion about their own spine. In my experience, this kind of bodily awareness kicks in around the age of 11 but sometimes not til much MUCH later (oy). Weirdly enough, the upper age limit is much the same. As we age habit turns harder than healthy bone. Folks will report standing up perfectly straight from some pretty far off postures. A part from all the common sense aspects of aging that relate to all exercise (consult an expert, don't guess) the big question remains can this person recognize and take responsibility for the exact position of their body. Older folks and injure of handicapped people can often exert safely and productively on the Pilates machines well with in their personal limitations.

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### **What shall I look for in an Instructor?**

A free session. No, seriously folks, no amount of lip flapping or fine printing can tell you if this person is good at helping other people with unfamiliar movement. Any bozo can memorize and bark orders but helping folks learn through individual difficulties takes training and experience. If you can't get a free class, then ask to watch one. If you can't...move on. Don't worry if your

prospective new teacher has a nice body or not, just make darn sure they are skilled at helping people learn.

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### **Is it effective to work with videos?**

It could be, if that video has layered goals. Pilates is as much about awareness as it is about exertion so, people need a chance to learn what to feel, and where before they exert themselves aerobically. Once that kind of exertion is taking place, we think and feel a lot less clearly. Since a video can never stop and fix something you've learned incorrectly, doing a good and thorough job of introducing the moves would be very important. Each move would need to be broken down and time spent on it before tying it into a whole flow. The video would almost need to contain a series of small classes leading up to a complete flow. I wonder where one might procure such a wholly complete video? Perhaps, it is coupled with a lively colorful manual.

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### **What should I wear?**

You should be comfortable and avoid very thick waist bands or seams that might interfere with rolling or just laying on that spot. Also, think about this, your instructor is constantly assessing you so there is much they need to see. By the same token, there is much of you they do not need to see. Dress according to the modesty standards of nice people you have not yet met.

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### **What if it's too hard?**

Don't try to progress too fast. It's no exaggeration to say that I could fill an hour's lesson with 1 or 2 of the basic mat moves. Hundreds alone is a real bear of an essay. It's a self imposed progressively difficult pattern of simultaneous strain and release plus, it's way harder than sit ups if you do it right. If the class seems too hard, you should feel a snobby superiority to those goons who think mere limb flapping is pilates. You are seeking something deeper. Take your time, don't worry about feeling behind or bewildered, it will pass.

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### **What if it's too easy?**

Video yourself. I can kick my own butt with the basic routine by staying super focused on form. Dollars to donuts one long look at your own form on video will convince you that there are worlds yet left to conquer, alexander.

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### **How often should I practice Pilates?**

The quick answer is 3 times a week. The long answer explains why. Things we do once a week or less are really only useful while we are doing them. Our goal is to carry the hard tissues(bone) using the soft tissues (everything else) in a new way. So, an infrequent session can help, but it won't stick as habit. We commit to use these arcane and archaic techniques to make progress. Even 2 sessions a week has the danger of constantly re-learning routines and moves. Getting through a routine isn't Pilates, getting through it retaining your form and breathing is.

3 times a week gives you a darn good chance to get past the cumbersome, necessary memorization stage so you can begin working on what you've learned. Does anybody think doing a Kung Fu routine once will make them any tougher? Does anyone think memorizing lines is acting? 3 times a week, y'all. Practice hard.

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### **What if it hurts if I do a Pilates move?**

Stop and learn more. Practice materials cost money, practice itself is free. Learning why something hurts seems like a great thing to spend money on. If you can understand the cause of the pain, you can at least decide if you should work through it, work around it, or skip it. So, if you need to spend a little money on 1 private session or a physical specialist, its probably worth it.

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### **Will Pilates fix my back?**

Maybe. If you can *already* assume the various ready-positions, then you can use Pilates to decompress your vertebrae some. Usually, this is a big improvement. Learn more. Don't push on parts that hurt unless you *absolutely* know why.

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### **How much should it cost?**

I'm too scared to answer that question. All I've got the guts to say is that we built this to save people money.

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### **Will Pilates make me skinny?**

Sort of, but in 2 ways. Chances are, your look will be enhanced more by a good spinal alignment than by losing a handful of pounds. We are all "skinnier" when we are taller, its simple hydrodynamics. So, the basic skills of decompression bring huge benefits to how "skinny" we look.

At a more exciting, aggressive level, as you move into intermediate work it is far more challenging to keep pace with good form. Just doing stuff right and fast becomes an aerobic event. One of the few aerobic workouts that is actually good for your skeleton and its alignment. People who get to this level begin to change fast. Kicking your own butt to *maintain form* is Pilates at its finest.

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### **How do I get started?**

Become an arm chair quarterback. Read a book, take a free class, borrow a video or 2 and speed watch them, anything to learn more and put off spending money. No matter how well you choose, there will come a moment where you have paid good money to be confused, uncomfortable, and annoyed. This would be a great time to have faith in your choice.

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