**Title: Pilates Benefits**

**Description: Pilates benefits include significant physical and mental improvements. Many are not found in any other fitness technique.**

**Keyword: Pilates benefits, benefits of Pilates, Pilates**

**The Benefits of Pilates**

**“I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” – Albert Einstein**

I am continually amazed at the genius of Pilates and that the world has yet to fully recognize his accomplishments. Quite simply Pilates is the Einstein of fitness and you are about to discover why. The amazing benefits of Pilates exercise set it completely apart from all other fitness programs. Let’s look at these game-changing accomplishments and benefits thru the lens of my personal experience of not only teaching and practicing Pilates for over 35 years, but also trying nearly every other exercise method available.

* He discovered three muscle groups in the center of the body that are ignored by nearly every other exercise method, and simply don’t get strong by themselves even if you’re a serious athlete.
* When these muscles are strengthened, everything changes, resulting in dramatically improved posture, balance, strength, mobility, and athletic performance. Nearly 100 years later, every elite athlete now includes Pilates in their conditioning program.
* Most back problems disappear by strengthening core muscles, specifically by strengthening abdominal muscles rather than the back! This Pilates idea has since been scientifically proven and is a key principle for physical therapists worldwide.
* Placing attention on your movement rather than ignoring it with music or TV is transformative and a major reason why a Pilates workout makes you feel energized rather than exhausted!
* Exercising with fluid and controlled movement does not harm the joints. This has been recently confirmed by exercise research.
* Dynamic stretching as found in Pilates is more effective than passive stretching. This has also been confirmed by research.
* Strengthening core muscles is more effective for the relief of most back problems than surgery or medication. Research confirms that our best surgical and pharmaceutical methods are 30% effective. Whereas Pilates exercise is over 80% effective.
* Pilates exercises primarily utilize eccentric contraction which builds lean and long muscle tissue rather than short bulky tissue.

**Strengthening Neglected Muscles**

Pilates coined the term ‘core’ to describe all the muscle groups that surround our mid section – inner and outer abs, inner and outer obliques, lower back muscles, the glutes, and the iliopsoas. Our outer abs and obliques are generally well developed and bulky. By strengthening the other muscles we no longer need to rely so much on bulkier ones, and when all the muscles work in consort we are much stronger. Normal movements are transformed, such as walking, standing, lifting, and sitting. We feel lighter, leaner, taller, and more balanced. And most back problems disappear!

**Healthy Joints**

Let me make this point with a quick story. I like to do many kinds of exercise. Among them are hiking and running. As I get older I notice the wear and tear from these two activities, particularly on my knees and lower back. Thus, I foresee a time in the not too distant future when I won’t (or can’t!) do these activities anymore.

Not so with Pilates! The controlled and fluid movement that is central to Pilates is the healthiest way to move our joints, and thus, it is exercise that you can do for the rest of your life! That’s not true for so many exercises we do, not just running and hiking. What kind of exercise will you be doing in your 70’s, 80’s, 90’s and beyond? Pilates may be the only one!

And while we’re on the subject of joints, here’s great news for the older body. I’m in my late 50’s and I’m just not feeling as limber and flexible as I used to, especially in the morning! Whether from a lifetime of athletics or just getting older, I often start the day stiff and “feeling my age”. There is absolutely no better antidote to joint stiffness and pain than exercise! This is particularly exciting news for arthritis sufferers. [Recent research](http://arthritis.about.com/od/exercise/a/strengthtrain.htm) shows fascinating benefits from strength training, including pain relief as effective as medication. qAny strength building exercise is effective, but with Pilates you won’t cause any further harm! Just 30 minutes of Pilates when I’m stiff and I feel young again!

**Leaner, Lighter, & Safer**

Our outer abs and obliques are large and bulky muscle groups. Traditional strength training builds short and bulky muscles, and concentrates on certain muscles and neglects others. Imbalanced and bulky muscle development is a recipe for injury, particularly chronic back pain. Pilates strengthens the entire body, even the ankles, wrists, and neck. The prevalence of eccentric contraction in Pilates exercise creates leaner and longer muscle tissue which is equally as strong as other kinds of muscle but less bulky. And by developing muscle groups that we rarely par any attention to in most other exercise programs, we decrease our reliance upon fewer and bulky muscle groups such as the outer abs and obliques. The result is a lighter and stronger body with more evenly developed muscles, and [improved sports performance](http://www.pilates.com/BBAPP/V/pilates/your-sport-and-pilates.html), particularly in those activities that heavily rely upon core strength such as golf, running, dance, and equestrian sports. And with a lighter, leaner, and more balanced body comes a drastically decreased risk of injury. This is why all [professional athletes](http://www.pilates.com/BBAPP/V/pilates/professionals/athletes-and-trainers.html) now include Pilates in their training programs. And for the non-athlete, everyday movement is more enjoyable because it’s stronger, leaner, more balanced, more flexible, more efficient, and pain free.

**More Energy**

You’ll be surprised by a feeling of greater energy and vitality at the end of a Pilates workout. This is so distinct from the exhaustion that is typical of other rigorous activities. This exhilaration is due to the full and frequent breathing throughout the Pilates workout fostered by natural breathing patterns for each exercise. Breathing oxygenates the bloodstream and every cell of the body. Movement stimulates the nervous and lymph systems. The more you exercise, the more energy and wellbeing you feel.

**Complete Workout**

As I just mentioned, I like a lot of different kinds of exercise. But Pilates is my favorite because it’s complete. Here’s what I mean by the word “complete”.

[Fitness research](http://health.usnews.com/health-conditions/heart-health/information-on-fitness) has taught us that the body needs three kinds of exercise to be healthy: strength training, stretching, and cardiovascular conditioning otherwise known as aerobics. Any one of these alone will not keep you healthy. For instance, if running is all you do for exercise, this is aerobics and my heart and lungs greatly benefit, but aerobics does not build muscle tissue, and by age 30 men and women are naturally losing muscle all over the body. Only strength training restores and builds muscle. And muscle provides a protective layer around all our joints. Without strength training a runner is at great risk for a variety of joint injuries particularly in the knees, back, and shoulders. For much more about the necessity of these 3 kinds of exercise please refer to my article.

Pilates mat exercise is the only fitness technique that combines all three of the exercises that the body needs into one quick workout. Now I want to be careful what I say here: strength training and stretching are clearly provided by Pilates whether you use Pilates machines or mat exercises, and whether you’re a beginner or advanced practitioner. However, only advanced mat exercises add that third important component: aerobics. It does this by moving from one position to the next without pause so you can raise your heart rate to your target level and sustain it for 30 minutes. This level of aerobic activity 5x per week is [recommended](http://www.livestrong.com/article/145445-recommended-amount-of-cardio-exercise/) for a healthy heart. If you have to adjust machinery you never achieve this recommended sustained target heart rate.

**Exercise Freedom**

Mat exercises allow you to workout anytime and anywhere without a gym or equipment. This is particularly convenient if you travel or if you’re homebound by bad weather or a sick child or a car that’s in the repair shop. I’ve done Pilates in hotels, at the homes of friends and relatives, even in airports, because all I need is a space the length of my body, a soft surface, and 30 minutes! I’m not constrained by gym hours, class schedules, or expensive fees. It’s the ultimate in exercise convenience.

**A Quick Workout**

Pilates emphasizes 3-5 repetitions for each exercise, except the first Pilates exercise known as “The 100”. At the advanced level you move from one exercise to another – about 40 in all – without stopping for a complete and rigorous mat routine in 30 minutes.

**Mind/Body Integration**

This is a completely different method of exercise! Try it for yourself with my free online lessons at [www.PilatesLessons.org](http://www.PilatesLessons.org)! One of the most striking differences is that Pilates connects your mind and body. This is accomplished by shutting off the music and taking off the earphones. We slow down our movement to coordinate with deep breathing, to move precisely and fluidly, and to build awareness of the spine. We’re paying attention to how the body feels and whether the discomfort is healthy muscle building and stretching, or your body saying ‘Stop!’ This is injurious!”

This kind of attention is not only the best defense against injury, it’s a brand new relationship with the body! We no longer ignore or fight the body, but rather engage in a partnership, listening and responding respectfully, and rewarded with strength, balance, painless joints, and a healthy back!

**Back Rehabilitation**

Joseph Pilates was the first to realize that most back problems are the result of weak abs rather than a weak back. His cure and the phrase he coined – ‘core strength’ – is now a fundamental principle of physical therapy. Medical research confirmed his theory that exercise is the best medicine for most back problems. Our best surgical and pharmaceutical methods provide a 30% success rate for back injuries. Contrast this with over 80% back relief with Pilates exercise. As my teacher Mary Bowen often says, “Pilates saves lives!”

**Safe Workout**

The Cardinal Rule in Pilates is ‘If it hurts, don’t do it!’ Our fitness culture encourages us to ignore any body messages that hint of weakness with such common phrases as ‘No Pain, No Gain’, ‘Tough It Out’, and “Work Through the Pain”. Pilates challenges you to listen to your body rather than ignore it, and become a friend and partner rather than an adversary. It’s as rigorous a workout as you’ll find, but with an entirely different attitude. I wasn’t sure it would work for my back problem, but I gave it a try, and I soon discovered the genius of Pilates. Placing my attention on my body taught me ways to move that are more efficient and enjoyable, as well as stronger and more balanced. Furthermore, after the workout I felt invigorated rather than exhausted. And finally, all this attention to the body protects me from injury, because I am sensitive to movement that doesn’t feel natural. No more war with myself!

**Dynamic Stretching**

Pilates exercise involves “dynamic stretching” which is a fancy term for stretching while you move which is distinct from “static stretching” achieved by holding a position as in yoga. Dynamic is also distinct from “ballistic” stretching or bouncing which is universally discouraged because of the high risk of muscle damage.

Stretching [research](http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=stretching+exercise+research&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholart) indicates that dynamic stretching is the best in terms of increasing range of motion and reducing joint and muscle pain. There are even indications that dynamic stretching after strength training improves muscle recovery time.

What we also know is that stretching as a means of warming up before you exercise is not effective in reducing the risk of injury.

In conclusion, Pilates is truly unique. Try it for yourself. And I have a special treat for you – free lessons! Just visit my website at [www.PilatesLessons.org](http://www.PilatesLessons.org).