

Getting Back in Shape with PILATES

Why adding Pilates to your workout routine can help you reach your weight-loss goals

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There are many reasons why people work out... reduce stress, increase energy, rehabilitate an injury, improve sports performance, and quite often to lose weight. But no matter what your reason to venture into the gym or to your local mind-body studio, with the winter moving full steam ahead and dreams of warmer weather around the corner, training programs are top of mind and people are looking for alternative ways to reach their workout goals.

Whether you're looking to lose those last five pounds, shoot or score higher, fit in a bikini, or wear your favourite skinny jeans – it's important to find the right motivation so that you can get the most out of your routine to maintain a healthful lifestyle.

It's no secret that more and more people are turning to mind-body fitness to expand their exercise options. With over 10 million people participating in Pilates in North American alone, this unique

form of exercise is making its mark in the fitness industry and people of all ages are reaping the benefits. But with the pressures to stay thin at an all-time high in our society, and the old school thought that Pilates is associated solely with rehabilitation still looming – many people still don't know what Pilates can do for the body inside and out.

The Pilates Way

Pilates can be a positive addition to your overall weight-loss program. STOTT PILATES® exercise in particular is a musculo-skeletal conditioning program. It's ideal in combination with some kind of cardiovascular exercise (walking, running, aerobics, aqua fitness etc.), and a great complement to your weight training program. However, it's still a known fact that eating right, drinking plenty of water and working out regularly is the key to shedding unwanted pounds.

Weight loss occurs when the number of calories consumed is less than the number of calories expended. The most successful and healthy way to achieve weight loss is an exercise plan that includes an aerobic component coupled with a strength training component, such as STOTT PILATES® exercise, and following a balanced diet. Combining Pilates with aerobic exercise also offers additional benefits: greater mind-body connection, improved posture, flexibility, and functionality.

Aerobic exercise is important to aid in weight loss, but to lose and keep the weight off you need to increase your resting metabolic rate (RMR). Your metabolic rate is the speed with which your body burns calories when it is resting. The more muscle tone you have the faster you will burn calories as muscle burns more than fat. A Walking Pilates program is also a great way to burn calories and a smart way to add cardio to your everyday routine.

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The Professionals' Choice™

STOTT PILATES®, the premier brand of Merrithew Health & Fitness™, is recognized all over the world. In fact, there are over 30,000 students trained in this method alone in over 106 countries. STOTT PILATES is contemporary and instructors focus on their client's core strength and increasing body awareness in order to ensure the correct muscles are being worked for the particular exercise or movement.

“The STOTT PILATES method of exercise helps fitness enthusiasts and athletes alike build muscle, increase strength, and prevent injury – all of which help maximize athletic performance and physical improvement overall,” explains President & CEO of Merrithew Health & Fitness™, Lindsay G. Merrithew. “The goal with STOTT PILATES exercise is to strengthen the postural muscles while achieving optimal functional fitness. We all want to be able to move easier and do the things we enjoy, and that's where this form of exercise comes in because it's suitable for all ages and fitness abilities.”

Whether you are a professional athlete, a new mom, or someone who just wants to walk without pain, it is important that the smaller (local stabilizing) muscles are strong. As these inner muscles become more efficient, exercise programs working the larger muscle groups are designed to build a balanced muscular structure. Hence, you have the development of long, lean muscles aiding in your weight-loss program. By adding Pilates to your regular routine, you'll start to notice losing inches, particularly in the abdominal area, as there is a major emphasis on abdominal strength.

Benefits of Pilates

Unlike other strength training regimens that focus more specifically on muscle mass, Pilates focuses on re-balancing your muscles around the joints, and improving your alignment and flexibility. Pilates also focuses on proper breathing, balance and sport-specific range of motion. Over the past two decades, the original form of Pilates has been refined to meet the demands of today's fitness needs. When all muscular systems work in a timely and coordinated

fashion, participants can achieve large gains in strength, skill, coordination, and biomechanical efficiency.

STOTT PILATES® exercise improves core strength and balances the muscles around the joints, improving the way your body functions, looks and feels. The Five Basic Principles focus on: Breathing, Pelvic placement, Rib cage placement, Scapular movement, and Head & cervical spine placement.

“Pilates assists in rehabilitation after injury and creates balance throughout the entire body,” says Moira Merrithew, co-founder and Executive Director of Education for Merrithew Health & Fitness. “As a result, you can withstand rigorous training regimes and ultimately improve your strength and endurance and ultimately prevent or recover from injury. This leads to improved performance in anything you set out to do. Pilates is a great addition to any weight-loss routine.”

As an integral part of your weight-loss program, Pilates is a key component to strength conditioning because it focuses on the deeper muscle groups, or 'local' stabilizers. This is important when controlling joint movement and in sustaining the stability of the joints that can often be damaged through repetitive and high demand training.

Variety is the Spice of Life

Exercisers of all ages can incorporate Pilates into their regular daily activities and enjoy every minute of the workout. Pilates is a fun form of exercise that can be done with props for added variety using non-repetitive movements. Props such as the Mini Stability Ball™ or Foam Roller™ help keep this form of exercise interesting. By adding small props to your workout you'll see improved results ~ from how strong your body feels, to your renewed sense of focus, and your ability to exert more energy overall at work and play.

Well-trained certified instructors are also able to tailor a program to any fitness level or age range. The nature of the exercises and the equipment used keeps stress off the joints while strengthening the muscles. Pilates not only balances strength with flexibility, but it helps to train or retrain the neuro-muscular system (brain messages to the muscles) to correct or strengthen muscular firing patterns.

For regular exercisers, there is usually a tendency to overtrain one set of muscles over the other depending on the sport. In this case, Pilates programming can be developed to help re-balance the way the muscles are firing (contracting, working) – making the exerciser more efficient at what they do and prevent injury.

Reaching Your Goals

There are many ways that doing Pilates supports weight loss and a trimmer appearance. Pilates helps improve posture by creating a leaner look and emphasizing both length and good alignment.

Pilates also helps sustain energy levels throughout your day and is a form of exercise that is often attributed for creating long, lean, fit bodies. However, Pilates is not considered aerobic exercise. Therefore, in order to reap the benefits of this form of fitness for a trimmer physique, it is important that you combine Pilates with cardiovascular exercise to maximize your weight loss endeavor.

And last, but certainly not least, Pilates also promotes self-esteem and heightened lifestyle consciousness. Both are associated with weight loss and overall well-being. People feel invigorated and more alive and therefore lends to the entire package of activities geared toward your weight-loss rituals.

For more information on Pilates education, equipment and accessories, visit www.merrithew.com