



# PILATES Explained



with WSC Physiotherapist Gosia Antczak

Most of us have heard of Pilates but **what exactly is it?**

Well, in a nutshell, it is a collection of exercises, which are aimed at maintaining or improving one's core stability. Named after its developer, Mr Joseph Pilates, born in Hamburg, Germany in 1880. He was a keen athlete with a passion for gymnastics, boxing, diving and skiing. He also studied Yoga, Karate and Zen Meditation.

Joseph Pilates was a strong believer in the relationship between the mind and the body and that exercise enhanced the mind as well as the body.

Over the years, the principles have been refined to reflect current understanding of applied anatomy, physiology and kinesiology.



Many different styles of Pilates have evolved over the past 20 years. There are 3 main styles:

1. **The Repertory** remains close to the teachings of Pilates and is still used with dancers and can be seen in large "mat class" presentations.
2. **The Modern**, which has been substantially modified and focuses on exercise precision and technique and uses a variety of equipment
3. **The Clinical** which evolved in the last decade and is driven by research evidence and is commonly applied in rehabilitation of spinal injuries



## How does it work?

The main aim of a Pilates program is to optimise the function of deep abdominal muscles (the transversus abdominis) and the deep spinal extensor muscles (the multifidus). Strong and efficient deep stabilising muscles of the spine help to achieve a good and stable base for the movement of the limbs. It is an excellent method of corrective exercise and musculoskeletal conditioning.

The exercises are characterised by slow flowing movements of the limbs whilst maintaining good spinal alignment, which we call "neutral spine". It is important to maintain a calm breathing pattern throughout the exercises.

A typical program focuses on achieving high number of repetitions of the same exercise at a low to medium load. Progression is usually achieved by moving onto a more difficult exercise or movement rather than adding resistance or increasing speed. The program may consist of mat based exercises in some cases utilising equipment such as elastic bands, Swiss balls or balance boards. Clinical Pilates equipment such as the Reformer or the Cadillac/Trapeze table can also be used to achieve specific goals.

## Who can benefit?

Pilates exercise program can play an important role in rehabilitation following spinal injury such as low back and neck pain, disc bulges, facet joint strains, spinal instability and degenerative conditions such as pain associated with osteoarthritis.

It can also be very useful in improving movement technique and subsequently performance in sport. It does so by optimising efficiency of movement, flexibility, coordination and energy conservation.

To achieve best results from Pilates rehabilitation or conditioning program, an assessment by an experienced physiotherapist is recommended. It will reveal any insufficiencies in the pelvic and spinal stabilisation system so that any muscle weakness and motor control dysfunction can be addressed with a program designed to individual needs.

Gosia conducts regular Pilates classes at the Wakefield Sports Clinic – for more information, call 8232 5566.