

# Pilates: A Low-Impact Way to Build Core Strength, Endurance and Flexibility

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ROCHESTER, Minn. — The first instruction in a Pilates class? How to say it: puh-LAH-teez.

The June issue of Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource addresses this increasingly popular low-impact fitness technique. Pilates emphasizes mind-body connection and breath control to build strength, endurance and flexibility, particularly in the trunk muscles.

Many women opt for Pilates because it can provide a nicely toned look without adding bulk. Practiced regularly, Pilates can assist with weight loss and help alleviate low back pain.

Pilates isn't new. In the early 20th century, Joseph Pilates, a German citizen, developed a system to help his fellow inmates at a World War I internment camp stay physically conditioned. He later opened a studio in New York where his teaching gained a following in the dance and performance arts communities.

Today, Pilates classes are widely available at health clubs, studios, community centers and senior centers. Pilates can be done on a floor mat or using specialized equipment, such as stability balls, resistance bands or most often, a Reformer. This piece of equipment consists of a sliding seat and a series of springs and pulleys that allow progressive exercises to strengthen all muscle groups.

A typical Pilates session includes a set of controlled stretches and movements, with participants concentrating on breathing, precision and flowing movements. Instead of emphasizing quantity, Pilates focuses on quality — doing a few, extremely precise repetitions.

The best way to start is to enroll in a class taught by a qualified instructor. Success with Pilates depends on precision of movement and effort. Proper instruction is key to knowing how to exercise and achieve the benefits.

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