

Pilates helps practitioners build strength, overcome pain

By [Body and Mind staff](#)

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Instructor Rebekah Morgan of Morgan Pilates in New Cumberland instructs client Jessica Regan during her workout.

Two years ago, after listening to his brother rave about Pilates, Terry Meiser, 66, signed up for a few sessions.

But he didn't anticipate good results: "I'm an outdoors person — hunting and that sort of thing — and most exercise programs don't work for me," he said.

After starting Pilates classes with Rebekah Morgan, owner of **Morgan Pilates, New Cumberland**, Meiser came to appreciate his brother's passion. Retired from Meiser Lumber Co. in Millerstown, he was nursing an old arm injury from baseball as well as the physical effects of getting older.

"Rebekah started with the basics and worked to strengthen my arm," he said. "After several months, in addition to enjoying Pilates, I realized I no longer was experiencing lower back pain that had always been like a daily toothache. That's when I started paying attention. Now I can do more than I could do seven or eight years ago. The real nugget is: I didn't anticipate any of this."

First taught in New York in 1926 by its creator, Joseph Pilates, this method of exercise and physical movements is designed to stretch, strengthen and balance the body. Today, not only is Pilates a popular workout, either in mat classes or with several pieces of apparatus, but it is also key to helping those with physical issues.

According to Dr. Michael Lupinacci of PRISM (Physicians of Rehabilitation, Industrial and Spine Medicine), with offices on the East and West shores, Pilates focuses on muscles deep in the spine, abdomen and pelvic floor that are used to support good posture and efficient movement patterns. "Over time, these muscles degenerate," Lupinacci said, "and although you appear in good shape, you may not be strong down to the core."

Lupinacci tried Pilates at the urging of his wife. Even though he worked out with weights, cycling and aerobics, he found Pilates difficult at first. "Within a few months, however, my flexibility changed, and I was able to get the

idea of what a strong core felt like," he said.

Lupinacci said a ski trip he took after beginning Pilates was a real eye-opener. "My ski friends are extremely good, and I usually don't keep up with them, but I skied the best ever in my life," he said. "Through Pilates, I engaged my core and performed better. It was a dramatic realization."

In his medical practice, Lupinacci has seen great advances in treatment, but not much being done to prevent the epidemic of spinal degeneration as we age. "The only viable prevention is to fix the structure around the spine, i.e., the core muscles," he explained. "When I describe Pilates to patients, they look at me like I'm crazy, especially the men. But, all reported feeling stronger and more functional through strengthening their core muscles, which translates into pain control."

Morgan, who was a physical therapy assistant at **PinnacleHealth's Outpatient Clinic**, used to work on neck and back postural issues with her patients. She started doing Pilates and soon realized that what she was doing for herself would help her patients.

She obtained a professional Pilates certification and started teaching part time. "I became so busy through word of mouth that I decided to do this full time," she said.

Morgan's clients range in age from 25 to 72 and are mostly women. She takes time with each client to explain the theory of **core muscles**. "I refer to the core as the 'powerhouse.' Pilates teaches you how to initiate movement from your abdominals [powerhouse], which stabilizes the core muscles, allowing freer movement of your extremities."

According to Morgan, almost all clients have postural problems, and many complain of neck or back pain. Others have specific areas in need. "Once clients notice results, they become totally committed to the process," she said.

Jessica Regan, 33, of Camp Hill, is a Pilates fan. Diagnosed with scoliosis at 13, she wore a back brace from ages 13 to 15. She still has an "s" curve in her spine. "I've lived with pain forever," she said.

Around the time she went to investigate surgery at Johns Hopkins for a deformity of the rib cage, common in scoliosis patients, she started a regular Pilates regime with Morgan. "I had a long list to take to Hopkins of things that were causing pain," she said. "I recently found that list, and ironically noted that after several years of Pilates, nothing on that list hurt me anymore."

Although Regan's back will never be straight, she said she has gained core strength for better balance, posture and lung capacity. "Rebekah reads your body as you exercise to make sure you are doing it correctly, which is so important," Regan said, "and, at the end of each session, I leave feeling better and stronger."