

# The Pilates Method

*Having just opened the largest dedicated private Pilates studio in the South of England, ex-London Royal Ballet star Pippa Wylde shares her knowledge and experience of this vital form of exercise. Tara Walker found out more*

## What is the 'Pilates Method'?

It's a body conditioning and postural alignment exercise technique using a combination of mat-work, Pilates-styled resistance equipment and free weights to help develop a strong, well-balanced body. Joseph Pilates developed the original methods and equipment back in the 1920s, adopting various aspects of gymnastics, martial arts, dance and yoga.

## What makes Pilates so special?

Undoubtedly, the resistance equipment used is unique and has been specifically designed to strengthen, lengthen, balance, tone and relax the user. Unlike traditional methods of training and body development which tend to produce short bulky muscles (the types most prone to injury), Pilates resistance equipment elongates the spine, increasing the elasticity of muscles and the flexibility of the joints.

## Who can practise Pilates?

Pilates can be practised by people of all ages with any level of fitness. Exercises can be modified to accommodate many medical conditions and indeed Pilates has long been considered by many medical practitioners to be positively beneficial as an aid to recovery.

## What are the benefits?

You can expect an increase in body flexibility, mobility, balance, and body-awareness as well as a decrease in back and other more general pains.

## How is Pilates taught?

Many Pilates professionals believe that the 'Pilates Method' should be taught 'one-to-one' utilising specially designed resistance equipment. Pilates, if practised with more than one person, is not about competing with others. Studio sessions of up to six persons are intended to provide a peaceful atmosphere where you can concentrate on the movements of your own body. Basic mat-based exercises do not require any special



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equipment and once you have learned and understood them, they can be performed almost anywhere.

## What are its basic principles?

In order to offer the best possible health and fitness regime we have aligned our classes to the 'Body-Control' Pilates Method that centres around eight basic Pilates principles: relaxation, concentration, alignment, breathing, centring, coordination, flowing movement and stamina.

## How easy is it to learn Pilates?

Pilates is relatively straightforward. If you are starting as a complete beginner then there are four stages to be completed on your way to becoming truly proficient.

## What should I wear?

Ideally, your clothing should allow the alignment of the body to be clearly seen

by your instructor. It should also be comfortable and able to stretch with your body movements and should not be too loose. Leggings, shorts and T-shirts are all suitable. Exercises are carried out in bare feet (for safety) or socks if preferred.

## How often should I attend classes?

To achieve the best results we recommend a minimum of two sessions per week, although it is also possible to attend once per week at the studio combined with practising once or twice a week at home. The more you practise the quicker your progress and the sooner you will begin to see and feel real results. ■

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