

Key Principles of Pilates

If you are looking for a way to strengthen your body while increasing overall health and wellness, the Pilates Method of body conditioning might be the right choice for you.

Developed by legendary German national Joseph Pilates, the Pilates Method follows carefully laid out principles based on a well-constructed philosophical and theoretical foundation. Although it is practiced by fitness buffs throughout the world as a popular form of exercise, there is actually much more to the Pilates Method than simply being a form of physical exercise. The principles of Pilates combine to create a complete wellness method that has been developed and refined through more than eighty years of use and observation.

The principles of Pilates are drawn from a number of diverse exercise styles, including yoga, Zen, Greek and Roman ideals. In addition, there are certain ruling principles that are inherent to the Pilates Method of body conditioning. These principles are the ones that bring all of those diverse ideals together under the Pilates name. These include control, centering, concentration, precision, breathing and flowing movement. Let's explore each of these principles individually:

Control

Perhaps the most basic principle of the Pilates Method of body conditioning centers on complete muscle control. Sloppy and haphazard movements are not acceptable when practicing Pilates. Thorough concentration is required in order to have complete control over every aspect of each movement. It is also important to note that this principle does not only apply to the large motions of the limbs, but also to the precise position of the fingers, toes and head. Careful control of wrist rotation, the turning in or out of the legs and the degree of the arch or flatness of the back is also observed.

Centering

The Pilates Method of body conditioning focuses on a core group of muscles, also known as the "powerhouse". This core muscle group encompasses the lower back, buttocks, hips and abdomen. According to the principles of Pilates, all of the energy required for the workout is initialized in the powerhouse, and then flows outward to the extremities. It is believed that the physical energy is exerted from the core to coordinate one's movements throughout the rest of the body. In this way, a strong and potent foundation is created, and utilized through every aspect of daily living.

Concentration

One of the keys to success while practicing the Pilates Method is concentration. You need to be able to concentrate on every movement, all of the time. While paying attention to your movements, you must also be able to concentrate on your entire body. Once you are able to acquire full body concentration, you'll notice that the movements first viewed as simple are actually quite complex.

Precision

There is a definite purpose to each movement involved in the Pilates Method of body conditioning. Therefore, careful completion of every instruction is critically important to the overall success of the whole method. A properly trained Pilates instructor will tell you that leaving out any detail will essentially abandon the intrinsic value of the Pilates Method of body conditioning. When practicing Pilates, your main focus must be to perform every movement in a precise and perfect way. This precision will eventually become second nature, and will ideally be carried over into everyday life as you begin to perform all tasks with a degree of economy and graceful movement.

Breathing

The way that you breathe has a direct affect on your entire body. Full and thorough inhalation and exhalation are an integral component of the Pilates Method. Joseph Pilates believed that forced exhalation was the key to full inhalation. The principles of Pilates require breathing to be properly coordinated with movement. Every breath must also be taken with control, concentration and precision.

Fluidity

The final, but equally important, principle of the Pilates Method of body conditioning is fluidity. There are no static, isolated movements, as the human body does not naturally function in that way. Grace of motion is more important than speed. Ultimately, every Pilates movement should feel as fluid as a waltz or a long stride. The Pilates Method of body conditioning maintains that uniformly developed muscles are the secret to suppleness, natural grace and good posture.

Unlike other forms of exercise, the key to success in Pilates is not simply how you perform the actions, but also how well you understand the foundation. Studying the principles of Pilates will help you to achieve the results you desire.