



Principles of Pilates

Pilates can help you to improve your game by decreasing your risk of developing injuries, get you back on the court faster when recovering from an injury and increase your control and stability on the court.

The History of Pilates

Joseph Pilates was born in Germany in the late 1800's. He overcame various childhood ailments through commitment to exercise and bodybuilding, and became an accomplished sportsman. During World War I, Joseph left Germany for England to escape the draft. In England he interned as an "enemy alien" with German nationals, and began training his colleagues in his series of mat exercises. He also engineered a specific exercise system by rigging springs to hospital beds, which allowed bed-confined patients to exercise while immobile. Patients who used Joseph's exercise system demonstrated great success in their rehabilitation.

After his release, Joseph returned to Germany and continued teaching his exercise method. In 1923, he immigrated to New York where he and his wife opened a fitness studio and educated others on his exercise method for over 50 years. Since his death in 1967, the Pilates movement has flourished on an international level. Joseph's original series of exercises have been modified, but his principles remain at the core of Pilates exercises instructed in clinics and studios worldwide.

Benefits of Pilates

Pilates incorporates an increased sense of body awareness and focus on breath during the performance of stabilizing movements. Benefits of Pilates include:

- Improve posture
- Increase flexibility
- Improve muscle tone & develop leaner muscles
- Improve coordination
- Enhance balance & proprioception
- An alternative to high-impact activities
- Manage stress
- Rehabilitate injuries
- Treat back pain

A Stable Core

The key principle in Pilates is developing a stable "core" or low

back, pelvic girdle and abdominal region. Core stability requires developing the deep muscles which stabilize this area so there is a stable platform from which the extremities can move. It's also important to focus on improving the stability of the upper back musculature, especially the deep stabilizing muscles around the shoulder blades. When the stabilizing muscles of our lower torso and upper back are working properly, the demand is less on our legs and

arms. This is especially important in activities where we place excessive stress/load on our arms and legs, such as in tennis.

Improving the strength of the deep torso muscles does not mean performing sit-ups or abdominal crunches. One of the basics of Pilates is to target the deep abdominal stabilizing muscles—the transversus abdominus muscle. The transversus abdominus works in conjunction with the pelvic floor and diaphragm muscles to provide support to the lumbar spine and pelvis. Its fibres run horizontally like a corset, and when activated the corset tightens, thereby slimming the waist and protecting the low back. Pilates strengthens the muscles you can see, as well as the deeper muscles of stability which you don't.



Maria Sharapova performs a modified version of the Cobra, a Pilates exercise.

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How does it work?

Pilates exercises can be performed on a mat or by utilizing specialized Pilates equipment such as the Reformer, Trapeze Table, Wunda Chair or Barrel. Mat exercises can be challenged further by utilizing apparatus such as the Magic Circle, fit ball, foam roller, wobble board and resistance bands. When beginning a Pilates program, it's essential to have an individualized assessment by a properly trained physiotherapist or Pilates instructor. Your assessment will allow your instructor to devise an appropriate exercise prescription, reflecting your current health status, activity level, medical history and exercise/rehabilitation goals.

Stay Tuned

Next month we take a closer look at specific Pilates mat exercises you can use to increase your core stability and see the advantage on the court. ●