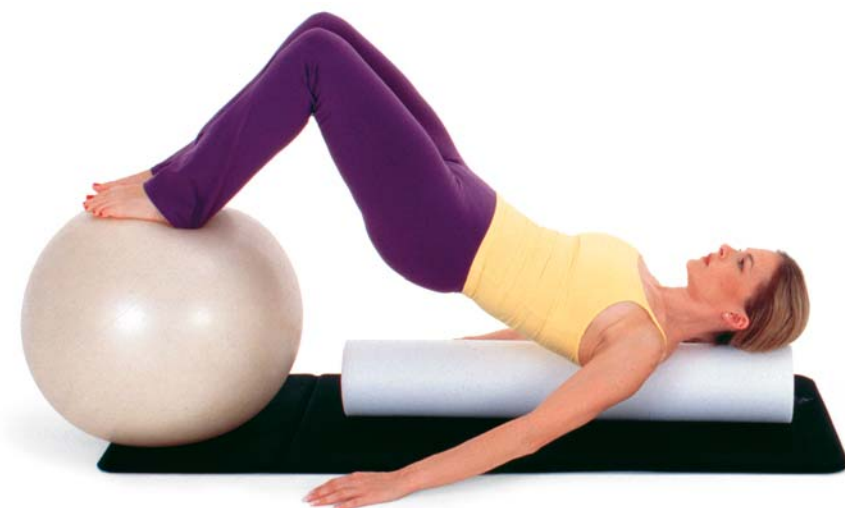


A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

Elizabeth Anderson and Liz Bussey explain that knowing what to do is just the beginning. It's understanding why and how it works that makes the difference. After all, it's a matter of principle...



Many of us who have trained to teach Pilates, or who have done any research or reading on the subject, will no doubt have come across the idea of Pilates principles. But what exactly are they?

At the Pilates Method Alliance international educational conference held in Denver, Colorado in November 2003, the Pilates principles were defined for the first time in a professional conference. The lecture, given by master instructors Dianne Miller from Vancouver and Debra Lessen from New York, had its foundation in Joseph Pilates' philosophical treatise *Return to Life Through Contrology*, published in 1945. The three major overriding principles that impassioned Joseph Pilates in life and exercise philosophy were:

- > Whole body health
- > Whole body commitment
- > Breath

Further, Miller and Lessen said, the teaching principles and ideas that are commonly used and expounded upon by Pilates professionals to provide focus, depth, and layers of learning in the technique are:

- > Mental concentration
- > Breath
- > Control
- > Precision of movement
- > Balanced muscle development
- > Centering
- > Rhythm
- > Flowing movement

As Pilates instructors, how well do we understand and utilise these Pilates teaching principles? How do we best apply them to help our clientele?

Today's fitness industry has benefited enormously from the extensive range of research projects focusing on rehabilitation and movement science. With the corresponding growth and development of educational >

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programmes teaching movement science, which incorporate this research for exercise professionals, we can approach the Pilates method with an improved understanding of anatomy and biomechanics. Our increased educational level allows us to observe and assess our clients' movement with a much greater depth of understanding than ever before. At the same time, the Pilates exercise repertoire has been continuously refined and developed over the years to incorporate relevant research findings. Joseph Pilates was reported to have changed and improved his technique continually over the course of his career, decade by decade. And while he worked fundamentally at an intuitive level, we are now able to integrate scientific developments and understanding in the way we teach his exercises today.

Most of us who have undergone Pilates teacher training have learned about the traditional Pilates principles mentioned above. They serve as tools to assist and educate both the client and instructor about the fundamentals of the technique.

These principles, or a similar list with some variations, are taught in most Pilates teacher-training programmes.

Brent Anderson, the President of Polestar Pilates Education based in Miami, Florida, is a physical therapist and orthopaedic certified specialist. Brent developed six principles building on the original list above, which he supported with scientific foundations. These principles are taught in the Polestar Pilates curriculum and explain in more detail the application of Pilates for the purpose of physical rehabilitation within a clinical environment.

Brent began studying and using the Pilates method in 1987 at the Centre for Sports Medicine at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, San Francisco, where physicians and therapists had begun to use Pilates' concepts to rehabilitate and condition dancers and athletes. The work of the physicians and therapists at the hospital created a new system, combining Pilates' traditional principles with current practices, standards and research in dance and sports medicine. The system developed at Saint Francis became



POLESTAR PILATES PRINCIPLES:

Principle I: Breathing — trunk organisation with inhalation and exhalation

Breathing, which is universally agreed as one of the key elements of Pilates training, can help stabilise and mobilise the spine and extremities. Pilates movements can create a condition where breath is facilitated to increase the efficiency of air exchange, to increase breath capacity and to promote thoracic postural changes. Correct breathing oxygenates the blood, aids mental concentration and assists in better recruitment of the abdominal muscles. It also creates a feeling of well being and relaxation.

Principle II: Axial elongation/core control

The principle of axial elongation and core control relies to a large extent on research carried out in Queensland, Australia (Hodges, Richardson and Julls). The phrase 'axial elongation' describes the elongating and lengthening of the muscles along the axis of the spine, which reduces vertebral compression. Axial elongation organises the spine and extremities into their optimal orientation for efficient movement, so that clients can better perform their sport and leisure activities. Even clients with spine injuries can often positively affect their quality of life through utilisation of this Polestar Pilates principle.

The Queensland research that relates to the Pilates principle of core control, demonstrates that the transverse abdominus, multifidus, diaphragm and abdominal oblique muscles are key organisers for stability in the movement of healthy people. A lack of organisation in this group of muscles can often result in low back pain. For this reason, many of Joseph Pilates' original teachings that refer to the 'powerhouse' or the 'core', have become quite popular among fitness and rehabilitation specialists around the world.

Principle III: Organisation of the shoulder girdle, thoracic and cervical spine

By analysing the posture and muscle tone of the client's head, face, neck and shoulder girdle, in relationship to the thoracic spine and trunk, movement efficiency can be observed and assessed. The shoulder girdle area is often highlighted as the main area of muscle tension and stress. The benefits of applying this principle are tension relief and a decrease in stress, which allow for increased range of motion and muscular efficiency.

Principle IV: Spine articulation

Studies have shown that following just one session of Pilates, healthy clients have an increase in overall stability and flexibility of the spine. Instructors who facilitate correct movement in the spine and who increase their client's motor awareness of spinal range of motion, significantly decrease their clients' chance of injury to the joints of the extremities.

Principle V: Alignment and weight bearing of lower and upper extremities

Alignment and posture are classic principles that have been adopted by both the rehabilitation and fitness worlds. Correct postural organisation has been found to significantly conserve energy expenditure in daily activities. Conversely, faulty alignment in the extremities and the spine can be the source of decreased joint range of motion, early fatigue of muscle groups, abnormal stresses and faulty movement patterns that may cause harm.


While Pilates pays attention to static alignment and posture, it places greater emphasis on dynamic alignment and posture. Pilates exercise allows practitioners to assess and address most alignment-related impairments in the spine and extremities.

Principle VI: Movement integration of pelvis, thorax, head and extremities

This principle ties together all of those that precede it. According to many Pilates specialists, movement integration is the reason for the inexplicable changes people often experience in the Pilates environment. Clients often feel an increase in stability and flexibility, an alleviation of pain, better alignment and overall muscular balance, as well as improved posture. The combination of these benefits results in an overall feeling of well being and an improvement in quality of life. The mastery of movement requires a connection between mind and body, and it is the achievement of this that signifies one of the primary reasons for Pilates' success.

the heart of the Polestar Pilates approach, which soon became recognised internationally, bringing it to the attention of mainstream health and fitness communities.

Pilates, a product of the 20th century, has become the fitness phenomenon of the 21st century. The world has seen an explosion of Pilates classes in health clubs and therapy centres worldwide, addressing postural imbalances, heightening body awareness, creating more efficient movement patterns, reducing the risk of injury and creating a beautiful physique. But if we are to sustain and support the extraordinary reputation that Pilates has gained in recent years, we need to gain credibility in the scientific community and we, as practitioners, must develop an interest in research within the Pilates field. We must be able to back up our claims scientifically, as well as anecdotally.

Knowing and understanding the Pilates principles, what they are and how they are applied, is essential. Once you have gained that understanding, you are free to be creative in your approach to exercise programming and to work with a wide range of clients. 



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