

Fundamental Pilates Exercises You Can Try

Have traditional exercise programs left you sore, tired and feeling flabby? When you've tried weight training and you've tired of aerobics, the Pilates Method might be the best choice for you.

The Pilates Method is a carefully orchestrated network of exercise, movement, breathing and concentration. There are more than 500 exercises involved in the program, including the fundamental Pilates exercises. These fundamental movements were developed for the sole purpose of preparing the body for Pilates by warming up the muscles and teaching movement awareness.

There is much to learn about the fundamental Pilates exercises. Experts will suggest that among the most important of these basic "rules" is to fully engage each set of muscles. Another essential pointer is to picture your mind feeling hollowed out, while concentrating on the way you breathe. Breathing in and exhaling deeply is necessary for your mind and body to perform to the best of their abilities.

Here are just a few of the fundamental Pilates exercises:

Pilates Method Exercises for Pelvic Awareness and Stability

In performing these basic exercises, be sure to engage your abdominal muscles with a neutral pelvis. Then, depress your shoulder blades as you lift your arms, and stabilize with a neutral pelvis

- * **Breathing:** Kneel on the mat and lightly place your hands on your lower ribs. Feel your ribcage open as you inhale deeply. Then, exhale deeply and close the rib cage. Picture your waist becoming wrapped on your exhalation. Repeat this exercise five times.
- * **Imprint and Breathing:** Lying on your back on the mat, position yourself with your knees flexed and your feet flat on floor. Lightly place your hands on the lower rib cage and inhale deeply. Feel your lateral and posterior rib cage expand. Exhale deeply and feel your spine imprint on the mat. Be sure to maintain a neutral pelvis as you complete the exercise. Repeat five times.
- * **Knee Stir-In:** Assume a supine position with your hand under the knee. With the opposite leg flexed with the foot flat on the floor, make small circles of the femur in the socket. Again, it's important to maintain a neutral and stable pelvis. You should experience a smooth and circular movement in your hip joint.
- * **Bridges (Pelvic Press):** Perform a 10-degree lift using your core muscles, but without using the gluteus maximus. Then, lift your weight onto your shoulders and thoracic area. Slowly lower from the shoulders, back to the starting position. Be sure to keep your abdominal muscles contracted, and focus on lifting and lowering one vertebra at a time. While performing this fundamental Pilates exercise, it's important to exhale while you lift, and inhale while you lower your body.
- * **Side-Lying Stability (Thigh Advance/Retraction):** Lie on one side on the mat, with your head on your arm. The opposite arm is in front, supporting your body. When in position, flex the foot of your top leg, and stretch the leg away from the hip joint. Retract slightly, and repeat these motions five times. Be sure to imprint the side of your rib cage, and use your core muscles to stabilize the spine and pelvis.

Pilates Method Exercises for Cervical/Thoracic Region Awareness and Stability

There are three fundamental Pilates exercises that are designed to increase stability and awareness of the Thoracic and Cervical regions. These basic exercises are outlined below. You will find more exercises geared toward this area of the body as you progress through your Pilates training.

- * **Neck Curl:** Assume a supine position on the mat with your knees flexed and feet flat on the floor. Support your head with your hands. Lengthen the back of the neck as your chin drops toward your chest and your head lifts off of the mat. Return your head to the mat while elongating the back of neck. Repeat three times. This fundamental Pilates exercise helps to isolate the neck muscles center the head on the neck.
- * **Puppet Arms:** As silly as it sounds, this exercise produces serious results for scapula movement and stabilization. In the supine position, flex your knees and keep your feet flat on the floor. Extend your arms up over the shoulders. Lift your lower arms while depressing the shoulders and abducting the scapula. Engage the oblique muscles by perform this same movement with your arm stretching diagonally across the chest. Repeat these motions three times.

* Cat-Flexion/Extension of Spine: On all fours, position your body with your knees und the hip joints and your hands under your shoulders. Like a cat, flex your spine toward the ceiling, and then lower and arch your back into the extended position. Keeping your arms straight, repeat this exercise five times.

Once you have mastered these fundamental Pilates exercises, you'll be ready to engage in more advanced mat work. With over 500 exercises in the entire program, you've got a lot to learn. Rest assured, the end result will be worth the effort.