

The body benefits of pilates

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(HealthDay)—If you're looking for an exercise that's gentle yet challenging and works your core like no other, consider Pilates.

Created by Joseph Pilates, a German gymnast and bodybuilder who immigrated to the United States in the 1920s, this fitness method uses controlled movements that can help flatten your stomach, strengthen your back, and give you better posture and flexibility.

Pilates combines exercises with a special breathing technique and concentration, so it connects the mind and body, and can help relieve stress and anxiety.

Pilates can be done on the floor using a mat and your own body weight as resistance. This so-called "mat Pilates" follows a sequence of moves that flows like a dance—in fact, dancers were the first group to embrace the activity for the performance benefits it gave them.

Other exercises involve special equipment developed by Pilates himself, with springs and pulleys to create the resistance. Best known is the unusual bench called the Reformer. The tension can be adjusted, so "machine Pilates" is good for both beginners and advanced enthusiasts.

You can learn Pilates from videos, but consider taking classes or private lessons to get started. An experienced instructor can make sure you're using proper positioning and breathing and help guide your development.

Of course, check the credentials of potential instructors to be sure they were trained by an established Pilates association, like the Pilates Method Alliance.

Also, keep in mind that while Pilates is a great core workout, it's typically not considered an aerobic [exercise](#). Don't forget your heart: Work Pilates into an overall fitness routine that also includes cardio, like walking or swimming.

More information: The American Council on Exercise has more

about the [benefits of Pilates](#) and how to get started.

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