

Pilates

Pilates mat classes are a favorite among members at many fitness centers. They are a great introduction to Pilates, and have many physical benefits. Most fitness facilities offer these classes free, as part of their regular group exercise schedule. However, it may be time to offer your members something more. Private Pilates sessions or small group classes that use equipment are excellent ways to expand your Pilates program, and to increase revenue by charging a fee. Is your facility ready for such a transition? Read on to find out about the major pieces of equipment needed to practice Pilates, as well as what you will need to set up a small studio within your fitness center.

Equipment

All of the major pieces of Pilates equipment can be used for a full-body workout, according to Kristen Redding, owner of The Pilates Studio of Friendswood, Texas. And, in addition to different pieces of equipment, there are different positions on each. Says Redding, "The different positions are used for strengthening and stretching the upper and lower body, to accommodate different fitness levels, to vary workouts and to challenge the body in different positions." These exercises can be used for everyone from the rehab client to the elite athlete, she says.

Reformer. The reformer is the main piece of equipment used in Pilates. It consists of two long tracks and a carriage that slides back and forth along them. At one end of the machine is a bar (which is pushed with the legs or arms), and at the other end are two straps (which are held in the hands or placed in the arches of the

Many fitness centers would like to offer Pilates classes or training sessions, but don't know where to start. Here, owners and managers of Pilates studios give the basics about equipment, accessories, square footage and what to offer your members.

By Anne B. McDonnell, Senior Editor

feet). The resistance for the workout is supplied, in part, by a set of springs that attach the carriage to the main frame of the reformer, explains Cate Vallone, owner/director, Evolution Pilates, South Windsor, Conn. "Exercises on the reformer progress from lying supine, where much of the exerciser's body is supported by the carriage, to seated, where exercisers must use their stabilizing muscles to stay aligned while the carriage moves back and forth," Vallone says. At the more intermediate/advanced level, exercises progress to kneeling and standing movements, where less of the client's body is supported by the machine.

The reformer can easily give a complete conditioning and flexibility workout for all fitness levels, says Redding. In addition, it focuses on balance and symmetry, as users try to evenly push or pull through an exercise. Rebecca

D'Amour, owner/master trainer at Synergy Fitness, Albany, Calif., agrees, saying, "One of the main benefits of the reformer is that it is great for coordination. It uses the arms, abdominals, legs and mid-back. It is also great for the mind to have to perform exercises that work more than one muscle group at a time."

The reformer is the most popular piece of traditional Pilates equipment, says John Garey, Stott Pilates master instructor trainer at John Garey Pilates, Long Beach, Calif. "It's great for training all muscle groups, allowing users to change the resistance to make exercises more or less challenging. ... [Also,] the spring resistance, straps and pulleys help to move joints through a full range of motion."

Cadillac/Trapeze table.

The other major pieces of equipment used in Pilates supplement mat work and reformer workouts. Many of the exercises on the Cadillac, chair and barrels are meant to make traditional mat or reformer exercises easier, as a building block toward performing the full exercise, says Vallone. Other exercises are meant to make mat and reformer exercises more challenging.

Says Garey, "The trapeze table, also known as the Cadillac, is like five pieces of equipment in one, making it one of the most versatile pieces of exercise equipment ever designed. With the Cadillac, you can work out beginner to advanced clients. Its design allows you to be supported in

Primer



a lying, sitting, standing or hanging position. Exercises on the trapeze table focus on all movements of the spine, as well as strength work for arms and legs.”

D’Amour uses the trapeze table with clients who only have use of one side of their body because of a stroke. Jessica Guercio, president and Stott Pilates instructor trainer, Pilates Studio of Central Ohio, Dublin, Ohio, agrees that it is also a great piece to use in a rehabilitation setting: “The client can be challenged by working in a standing, kneeling or sitting posture. A client can also work in a unilateral or bilateral movement plane position.”

Chairs. The stability chair, or Wunda Chair, can be used to supplement reformer workouts, but has also gained popularity as another piece of equipment to use in group classes, since it is small and doesn’t take up much space. Says Vallone, “Many movements on the chair are performed seated or standing, so ... it is a great piece of equipment to develop functional strength for clients [who] spend most of the week sitting at a computer or standing.”

Redding says that chairs offer great full-body workouts for balance, coordination and strength. “With a major portion of the chair’s exercises seated or standing, it is great for increasing awareness for improving posture. It is also compact, so it is easy to put it away,” she says. Guercio explains that the chair uses spring resistance, like the reformer and the Cadillac, to challenge a person further in their range of motion exercises.

Barrels. The ladder barrel, spine corrector and arc barrel all add a different dimension to exercises performed on equipment and the mat. The barrels are various sizes, and each has unique qualities. Many exercises are taught on all three pieces, but the shape of each piece will make the exercise feel different from one barrel to another, explains Garey.

The smallest, the arc barrel, can be used for clients who need more help. The largest, the ladder barrel, can be used for standing exercises, plus requires more stabilization than the smaller barrels. Says Garey, “One of the barrel’s



A mat class using arc barrels at Evolution Pilates.

greatest properties is its ability to mobilize the spine with support, or hold the spine in extension, flexion or neutral alignment while mobilizing the arms or legs. This provides great feedback for the client and helps with body awareness.”

Redding says that the ladder barrel is not considered a major piece of equipment, but is important for any well-equipped studio. “With emphasis on flexibility, it also has the added advantage of working core muscles in multiple planes of motion,” she says.

Accessories

The many different accessories used in Pilates help to modify an exercise to make it easier or more challenging. Popular accessories include the fitness circle, rollers, bands and balls. All of these “are great tools that can be added into a mat class [or] a reformer class,” says Guercio.

Fitness circle. The fitness circle is used in mat work routines, usually placed between the inner thighs to help exercisers engage their inner thigh muscles more efficiently, explains Vallone. The fitness circle can also be used in between the hands. “When squeezed with the proper positioning of the scapula and shoulder, the fitness circle builds strength in the pectorals, serratus anterior, lats, and lower and middle traps,” Vallone says.

Nancy Levin, Stott-certified Pilates instructor at AYC Health & Fitness, Prairie Village, Kan., says that fitness circles are “very useful to add variety and challenge for arms and shoulders, as well as abductors, adductors, glutes and hamstrings.” They also help with isolation of obliques in rotation exercises, she says.

Foam rollers. Foam rollers are used in mat work, and add stability challenges when standing or lying on them, and provide feedback to clients about body position and



A reformer class at John Garey Pilates.

awareness, says Garey. Vallone explains: “As clients try to maintain balance on the roller, they become more aware of their abdominals.” In addition, rollers can be used to simulate some reformer exercises.

Bands. Exercise bands, which come in a variety of resistance levels, are “the perfect prop for those who want to add resistance to mat work,” Garey says. There are many exercises that can be performed using bands to work all of the major muscle groups in the body.

Balls/BOSU. Balls introduce instability for a greater core challenge and glute/hamstring work, says Levin. In addition, says D’Amour, stability balls can be used to simulate some of the movements on the reformer.

BOSUs have also become popular in Pilates classes for balance training, says Vallone. “The unstable nature of the BOSU lets users practice kneeling and standing on a moving surface. They can also sit or lay on the BOSU to intensify mat work exercises. Even a simple crunch on an unstable surface becomes much more intense,” she says.

Starting an equipment-based program

If you are thinking about starting an equipment-based Pilates program at your fitness center, there are a few things to consider first. As far as square footage, Carol Tricoche, sales manager at Full Solutions Stott Pilates, Claremont, Calif. (and formerly Pilates director for The Claremont Club’s Pilates Studio in Claremont, Calif.), says that as little as 400 square feet is needed for an equipment-based program. This includes five reformers for private and semi-private sessions, and group classes.

How to Find Pilates Instructors and Choose Classes

By Ken Endelman

TWO OF THE most common questions from fitness center operators when it comes to Pilates are where to find Pilates instructors and what types of classes to offer.

Finding and training instructors

Fitness centers basically have two options for obtaining Pilates instructors: Hire externally or train your existing staff.

Hiring externally is good if you need your program to get started quickly. However, it is crucial that the instructor fits in with the philosophy of your fitness center, and the dynamic of your membership. If not, it can lead to problems for both the instructor and your program.

Training your existing staff can give you the comfort of knowing you will have instructors who are already familiar with your facility and its members. However, this can take more time. Fortunately, a number of organizations now offer onsite training that is conducted at your facility. These trainings can be modular, which allows your program to start quickly while your instructors continue their education as desired. In addition, some Pilates manufacturers now offer equipment and education packages. Fitness centers can get both the training and equipment for a relatively low cost per head. If you are considering a Pilates program and have not yet purchased equipment, call your manufacturer to ask about a combination package.

What classes to offer

What type of classes should your instructors teach? Mat? Equipment? Group sessions? Personal sessions? Options that will work best for your facility depend on several factors:

1. The size of your designated Pilates space.
2. The amount of equipment you have or are willing to invest in.
3. The financial demographic of your members.

(Will members pay extra for personal Pilates sessions?)

4. The background of your Pilates instructors. (Do they have group exercise or personal training experience?)

5. How many sessions you'd like to offer per day.

Most fitness centers offer a combination of group and personal sessions, since each scenario has its advantages. And, many facilities launch their Pilates programs with group mat classes. Mat classes incorporate the fundamentals of Pilates, but require no investment in equipment. Consequently, most fitness centers offer mat classes free to members. As the program matures, clubs may then invest in Reformers and transition interested members into fee-based programming.

The key to deciding what to offer is to poll your members. Most likely you'll find that mat and equipment classes are both desired, as are group and personal sessions. Some members prefer to work out with other people, and others like to exercise solo while getting individualized attention.

Group exercise

Advantages

- Small group sessions (typically four to six participants) can generate significant revenue. Participant cost per session can run from \$20 to \$50.
- More affordable pricing can attract members who would not sign up for one-on-one sessions, and the small group size still means they'll get plenty of instructor attention.
- Some members prefer the social dynamic and energy of a group experience.
- Programming for small groups can creatively explore the needs of specific demographics at your fitness center (Pilates for golfers, older adults, etc.)



and quickly build momentum for your program.

Keep in mind

- Although it can be recouped rapidly, a larger initial investment in equipment is required.
- You must be able to designate enough space for four to six people to safely use the equipment.
- Programming must stay fresh. Members won't come back if the classes don't stay interesting and challenging.

Personal sessions

Advantages

- Personal sessions are excellent revenue generators, and bring in typically \$50 to \$100 per session.
- They require less equipment and space.
- Some members prefer the individual attention and are willing to pay for it.
- They are ideal for members who have special needs.

Keep in mind

- The cost of personal sessions may be a barrier to entry for many of your members.
- An appropriate mind/body atmosphere without distractions is crucial for one-on-one sessions, and that can be hard to create in a busy club setting.

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This amount of space is also adequate for a fully equipped studio, with one of each piece of equipment, for private and semi-private training. However, optimal studio space for a fully equipped studio is 800 square feet, and allows multiple instructors to offer private, semi-private and small group classes with more than one of each piece of equipment, she says. Converting an unused racquetball court, for example, into an 800-square-foot studio can accommodate a full-service Pilates studio

with four reformers, one rehab reformer, one Cadillac, two ladder barrels, four stability chairs and various small pieces of equipment.

Vallone explains that a reformer and Cadillac each needs between 40 to 50 square feet of clearance. The chair and ladder barrels also need about 40 to 50 square feet of clearance, but can easily be pushed into a corner when not used. She agrees that, for group reformer classes, about 400 square feet is needed to accommodate four to six reformers.

Redding emphasizes that it is important to have enough room to move around between the equipment: "As a general rule, you need to allow a minimum of 24 inches between each piece of equipment."

As for what type of equipment to include, Levin says that a reformer and Cadillac should be included in any in-club Pilates studio. "With these two pieces, you can successfully start an equipment-based program, as they offer a complete-body workout that provides

a diversity of exercises.” D’Amour recommends two to three reformers, at least one combo half trap, one Cadillac, one to two chairs, one of each barrel, two to three foam rollers and a couple of stability balls for a complete small studio.

As a final word of advice, Tricoche cautions not to lump Pilates classes into the group exercise schedule. “Much too often, the fitness industry wants to put Pilates into the group exercise category alone. For example, mat-based Pilates is considered a group exercise feeder into Pilates equipment-based training,” she says. She recommends that Pilates be considered more like personal training, with the added revenue stream.

Why is equipment necessary?

Although no equipment is necessary to practice mat work, equipment is necessary to reap the full benefits of Pilates. Explains Val-lone, “Although we try to incorporate some arm and leg work into mat classes, most of the class emphasizes strengthening from the hips through the shoulders. The reformer workouts,

in contrast, tend to be more full-body. The spring resistance allows you to focus on legs and arms in some exercises, while still emphasizing stability of the spine and core strength.”

Equipment also helps to enhance the Pilates workout by providing variety. “It allows the instructor and client to focus on areas that may be difficult to target with a mat practice,” Levin says.

D’Amour explains that the equipment is needed for resistance, which increases bone density and adds challenges to the workout. Redding agrees, adding that the equipment

supports the body and, at the same time, improves joint range of motion, strength and flexibility. “Many of the exercises become more challenging when adding resistance to the equation,” Redding says. “Joseph Pilates’ equipment was originally made to supplement the mat, helping with form and filling in the gaps that the mat work could not do.”

Pilates equipment adds resistance, provides support and offers variety. Each piece is individual, but they all complement each other. Says Garey, “For the most well-rounded Pilates program, equipment is essential.” **FM**

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