

Why Add Pilates to Your Practice?

By Moira Merrithew, Executive Director, Education, STOTT PILATES®

With over 10 million people participating in Pilates in North America, it's no wonder this popular form of exercise is being embraced by the medical and rehab communities. Healthcare professionals are applauding the wide-reaching virtues of this highly targeted approach and reaping the benefits of an enhanced business.

There are numerous reasons why professionals would choose to incorporate Pilates into their practice. Pilates puts major emphasis on balancing the muscular structure which in turn allows more focus on joint stability and mobility, and freedom of movement. It also improves postural problems, increases core strength, helps prevent injuries, enhances functional fitness as a whole, improves balance, coordination and circulation, heightens body awareness, and is low-impact on the joints.

In his time, Joseph Pilates was considered by many to be a master of rehabilitation. His approach focused on core strength, precision and control of movement. Combine that with current exercise science and you've got a recipe for success.

The emphasis on breathing also allows exercisers to focus their minds on what their bodies are doing. Pilates is all about using breath more effectively so we can increase awareness and focus in our every day lives. So the ultimate mind-body connection is truly effective – benefiting most people who participate at any age or life stage.

Reaching the Physiotherapy Community

Contemporary approaches to the method today are paving the way for PTs because they consist of programming that accommodates all stages of recovery and rehabilitation. Along with a team of physical therapists, sports medicine and fitness professionals, our company led by President and CEO of STOTT PILATES Lindsay G. Merrithew and a team of experts, has spent more than a decade refining the method of exercise and equipment to make them more accessible for everyone. This has resulted in the inclusion of modern principles of exercise science and spinal rehabilitation.

Melanie Byford-Young, physiotherapist and a Rehab Master Instructor Trainer for STOTT PILATES' proprietary Rehabilitation

Program, maintains that the rehab community has definitely opened their arms to the notion of incorporating the principles of Pilates into rehab for older adults. "Acceptance of Pilates from rehab professionals varies with the education and exposure of clinicians to Pilates."

Pilates continues to be used to create positive movement experiences for those with any type of movement dysfunction. Leading Pilates authorities are assisting this currently by developing specialized programming for particular populations. Today there is a definite partnership between Pilates experts and rehabilitation specialists and by working together, we can bridge the gap between rehab and fitness and be able to reach an immense number of individuals who otherwise would not realize their movement potential.

"The Basic Principles of STOTT PILATES are consistent with the Basic Principles of Rehabilitation," adds Byford-Young. "We work on the premise that Pilates and rehabilitation needs to address the body as a whole, not just a collection of individual parts. Successful aging is the ability to function at the level an individual wishes – and requires mobility of joints as well as strength of the muscular system to propel us. The integrity of our shoulders, hips, knees and spine are all interconnected and must all be addressed when managing or preventing aches, pains and degeneration."

Pilates is gentle on the joints, focuses on suppleness and strength and can be used to address and rehabilitate specific issues with the active aging. Pilates can also be practiced for preventative measures and to stay in shape after physical therapy. It can be adapted to meet the needs and goals of individuals, and thus can be a very safe way to exercise and move the body. Pilates is both a mental and physical challenge and can be done for a lifetime. "For the clinician," adds Byford-Young. "Pilates is a template for assessing clients and for giving exercises and homework."

The Five Basic Principles

Mind-body connection is the perfect starting point for any type of movement strategy. The concepts of breathing, pelvic and lumbar spine alignment, rib cage placement, shoulder mobility and stability, and

head and neck alignment, can be applied to any movement for any diagnosis. Bringing awareness to posture may be the first step in improving fitness levels. According to Dianne Lee, stability is composed of "force closure" (muscular system) which in turn supports "form closure" – the bones, ligaments, and connective tissue. Putting the body in a position where it moves and reacts more efficiently will take away much unwanted stress and strain. Developing proper movement patterns will also allow the body to heal in a way that reduces the likelihood of compensatory injuries.

Although 'core training' may be a bit of a catch phrase in the fitness industry, the true definition of the term is widely acknowledged in medical and rehabilitation communities as the basis for reconditioning the support musculature of the body. Pilates as a method of exercise focuses on working the muscles from the inside out rather than the outside in. In this way, the deepest layers of muscles in the torso (local stabilizers), transversus abdominis, lumbar multifidi and pelvic floor to name a few, are trained to protect the lower back while allowing the body to perform movements with more ease and fluidity. This is achieved by performing controlled movements, and by paying special attention to the mind-body connection.

Stay tuned for Part II of 'Why Add Pilates to Your Practice' in the February/March issue of *Physiotherapy Today* to learn more about Pilates Programming and Equipment as well as how Pilates can help with sports injuries and breast cancer.

To find out more about the new STOTT PILATES® Rehabilitation Program and how to sign up for courses at the Toronto Studio, visit www.stottpilates/signup.

References:

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