

Slim with us!

Our devoted dieter gets to grips with weight-loss **Pilates** and overdoes things in India...

There's a quote on the Real Pilates schedule from Joseph Pilates himself. "After ten sessions you will feel better. After 20 sessions you will look better. After 30 sessions you will have a completely new body". Enticing stuff but, after about 15 classes, I have to agree with the big man.

The Real Pilates centre opened on Beach Road at the end of last year, offering Stott-trained staff and spanking new equipment (including reformers). The studio itself is a calming space with pale wood, raised stage, tea-lights and no clutter, while my instructor for the month, Delinda, is a mini dynamo, quick to correct and praise.

The weight-loss class begins with around 20 minutes of warm up to raise your heart-rate, then flowing movements throughout the session are done in quick succession to keep you sweating, often with equipment such as 'the magic circle' or a 2lb rubber ball. No time for yogic reflection here.

The first class went well, complete with that lovely pink-cheeked happy glow that makes you feel a bit smug for a few hours. The next few days were another story. I couldn't step off the curb. Laughing hurt. A lot.

Strangely though, after the initial class there was the odd stretch and tweak, but the pain factor was zero. And with every class I could feel myself getting stronger, clothes started feeling a bit loose, colleagues noticed I was losing weight, I was walking taller, breathing more deeply and sleeping better. How could this happen so quickly?

Pilates works by training your core or 'powerhouse'; the muscles in your lower abdomen, lower



back and hips. You must think about your breath (in through the nose, out through the mouth) with every movement, staying constantly connected to your core muscles, maintaining neutral alignment and executing each exercise with control. It can be tricky to stand on one leg, straighten the other, lift your arms (without raising your shoulders), and push against a training circle in pulses while doing the correct breathing. Believe me. But soon enough the breathing and core engagement become second nature – even to me, the girl who struggles to check mirror, signal and manoeuvre – so you can concentrate on the exercises.

Class sizes are kept small so the instructor can ensure everyone is in the correct position, working to their optimum and, of course, breathing correctly. It is this level of attention that has allowed me to progress quickly and Delinda reckons within a few more sessions I'll be able to do the splits. Always a good party trick. I'm definitely going to continue with the classes – if I could achieve so much in a month, who knows what this year could bring.

Of course, it's not just about exercise and I've (generally) been a paragon of virtue in the kitchen, as well as listening to hypno-

therapy most nights before falling asleep. I've also upped my water intake to three litres a day. My nutritionist Stephanie's ideas have been brilliant and I've been filling up on lean proteins, soups and vegetables, which sounds deathly dull, but recipes like crunchy couscous salad, spinach-parmesan cakes and crab burgers haven't meant I've been eating like a 'knit your own yoghurt' bean freak. The first week showed a loss of 1.2kg, with the same the following weigh-in. Thrilled, I skipped off to Kerala for three days, promising early morning yoga, using the hotel gym and eating only grilled fish. And what do you think happened? Curry. Lots of it. Handmade chocolates. Massages. Exercise consisted of the odd gentle stroll and a canoe race. My trainers remained untouched.

With only a day before the third weigh-in it was panic stations. Convinced to my (new, improved and stronger) core that I'd put on the 2.4kg I'd lost I considered standing up Stephanie and not showing my face at Dubai London Clinic until the next week, but faced the fear and stepped on the scales anyway. I'd put on 0.3kg but body fat had gone down, muscle mass had gone up and my waist was smaller. What?! The final weigh-in

was also one I was dreading, as I feared the Kerala curryathon had caught up with me. I was right. I gained 0.1kg but, again, body fat and muscle mass were moving (admittedly at glacial speed) in the right direction.

To be honest I'm disappointed that the number on the scale isn't falling faster, but slow and steady wins the race I'm told. Over the next month I'll be upping the cardio and getting a little bit violent with twice-weekly MMA (mixed martial art) classes with the Original Fitness Co. They assure me it's suitable for all levels of fitness. We'll just see about that. Real Pilates, Palm Strip Mall (opposite Jumeirah Mosque), Beach Road, Jumeirah, Dubai. Dhs65 per class, packages available. Tel: (04) 3453228. www.real-pilates.com Stephanie Karl, Dubai London Clinic, Festival City, Dubai. Tel: (04) 3446663. E-mail: nutritiondubailondonclinic@gmail.com

Weight loss: -2kg
Body fat loss: -1.2%
Muscle mass increase: +1%
Waist measurement: - 7cm
BMI: - 0.6



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