



GIVE PROPS SOME PROPS!

SPRUCING UP YOUR BASIC PILATES MAT EXERCISES IS AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE ...

By Kerrie Lee Brown

IT'S TRUE ~ VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE!

There is a large misconception that Pilates involves very intricate moves that only dancers would be able to execute, or requires large equipment that is bulky, hard to obtain, and expensive. But what most people don't know is that Pilates can just as easily be incorporated into regular workout programs by using a few basic props that can be found around your gym or fitness facility.

You can even spruce up your regular workout routine by adding exciting, new dimensions and intensities to basic exercises by way of "props." Fitness instructors, athletic coaches, and even rehab specialists are realizing that in order to keep their clients' attention and/or enthusiasm for a specific targeted muscle group or body part -- changing the way the move is performed is often crucial. Therefore, adding a prop or changing the dynamics of a particular move makes all the difference. Go ahead, try it! You'll be amazed at how fun and challenging it can be!

However, it's important to keep in mind that some popular Pilates exercises can put strain on the low back in people with typical postural imbalances. The good news is that there are numerous basic exercises that can be performed and/or modified on the mat that can be helpful in addition to an already established workout program.

For instance, light Pilates equipment such as 1 lb, 2 lb or 3 lb Toning Balls can help close the kinetic chain, add proprioceptive awareness, and add challenge to exercises by increasing the load or de-stabilizing the base of support.

STICK TO THE BASICS

Pilates Matwork is the foundation of the exercise system. All the basic exercises are designed to target very specific muscle groups in very specific ways. Pilates focuses on active eccentric lengthening of muscles rather than prolonged static strengthening. This results in

maintaining the integrity and strength of the joint while allowing it to move more freely in a greater range.

It is widely known that Pilates-based exercises help improve performance, reduce injury, and relieve stress. Unlike other hardcore strength training regimens that focus more specifically on muscle mass, Pilates focuses on toning your muscles, thereby improving your balance and alignment.

Pilates also assists in rehabilitation after injury and creates balance throughout the entire body. It is a form of overall strength and conditioning used in the development of strong core muscles and joint stability, which also focuses on breathing, balance and range of motion.

CORE CONNECTION

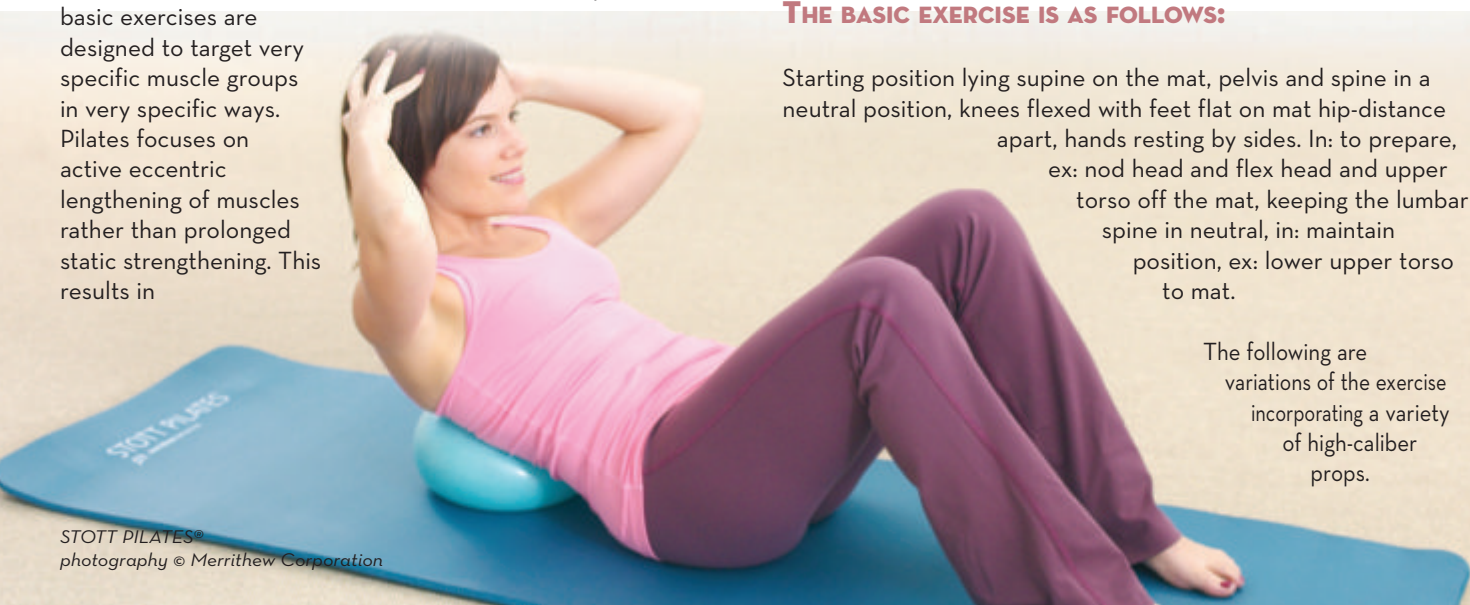
There are many variations to every exercise when light equipment or 'props' are used to target peripheral muscles or allow the exerciser to focus in a slightly different way. Altering the way an exercise is performed allows the neuromuscular system to be challenged in a new way requiring new pathways be developed and even making the brain work harder.

One of the best examples is the "Ab Prep" which can be performed on a mat. By adding various props to this move, you will rejuvenate a basic Pilates exercise that works the core and will literally add "punch to your workout" in no time. The Ab Prep is one of the most basic mat exercises and can be modified based on the equipment used and the intension of the exercise. For variety to your workout routine, perform the exercise with different props.

THE BASIC EXERCISE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Starting position lying supine on the mat, pelvis and spine in a neutral position, knees flexed with feet flat on mat hip-distance apart, hands resting by sides. In: to prepare, ex: nod head and flex head and upper torso off the mat, keeping the lumbar spine in neutral, in: maintain position, ex: lower upper torso to mat.

The following are variations of the exercise incorporating a variety of high-caliber props.



PILATES PROPS:**1. AB PREP WITH THE BALL**

Balls are used to bring awareness to scapulae stabilization.

2. AB PREP WITH SMALL STABILITY BALL

Smaller stability balls increase the range of motion by allowing the upper torso to be extended over the ball in the starting position. This puts the abdominal muscles in an elongated position to start and encourages a broader range.

3. AB PREP WITH CIRCLE

With the Circle resistance ring placed between the knees, the ab prep is performed with more emphasis placed on the lower body, especially the adductors of the inner thighs.

4. AB PREP WITH BANDS

With the band around the feet, this variation provides some resistance to the arms by

flexing the elbows to perform bicep curls. Another variation would be to bicep curl for 3-5 repetitions while in the flexed position.

5. AB PREP ON THE STABILITY BALL

Performed in the supine-incline position, the rounded Stability Ball takes the shape of the spine while allowing a greater range of motion. Alternately, with the hips lifted in a bridge position with the head and upper back supported on the ball, the ab prep becomes a much more challenging move requiring extra work from the hip extensors (glutes and hamstrings)

6. AB PREP ON A BOARD

An incline or decline positioned board is ideal for either increasing or decreasing the challenge of the standard ab prep. With the head at the higher end, gravity assists the spinal flexion while still supporting the torso. When done with the feet at the higher end, resistance from gravity is increased as is the challenge to the abdominal muscles.

7. AB PREP ON THE FOAM ROLLER

An excellent way to improve balance and control, performing the ab prep on the unstable Foam Roller requires increased work from all layers of abdominals as well as the legs.

TIME TO EXHALE

Pilates enthusiasts can use Matwork and/or equipment-based Pilates programming to fulfill their health and fitness goals. But for those of you who may not be as familiar with this method of exercise, but feel the need for a change - it's important to know that even the most basic of moves can be intensified by adding props.

Fitness facilities are realizing this as well. So if you're getting bored of your regular workout and want to "spice up" your training - just add a little something to your basic exercises and feel the burn once again! **OSF**

Kerrie Lee Brown is Vice President of Communications for STOTT PILATES®

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