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Real Pilates fits narrow, careful definition

Fitness participants beware! The term “Pilates” is public domain, allowing health clubs, recreation centers and trainers to call anything Pilates. Likewise, the deluge of videos is equally misleading.

Lured into overcrowded core conditioning classes using props and quick repetitive movements, participants think they’ve experienced Pilates. Regrettably, correct execution of this 80-year old method is being lost. Classical Pilates – a unique system of movement training – uses resistance-based equipment designed to uniformly develop the body. This low impact technique prompts precise, controlled mind-body connections to create agile and structurally sound bodies. Popularity and off-shoot approaches have led to misunderstanding this extraordinarily unique time-tested approach. The Pilates Method Alliance says that “Pilates is not ... in combination with any other forms of exercise, still Pilates.” Classical Pilates emphasizes development of the body’s core muscles: abdominals, hamstrings, inner thighs and deep gluteals, targeting those closest to the spine. It teaches correct alignment of joints, engaging more muscles to perform each movement, training the body to work uniformly from the inside out and minimizing need for countless repetitions.

More than 500 exercises correct postural imbalances and provide modifications for numerous health conditions, correcting over-training of muscle groups that lead to stress and injury. The result is functional fitness – the heart of the method – for daily activities of living and recreational pursuits, making the body less prone to injury. Pilates’ capacity to safely serve every age and ability is unmatched, creating whole body health for life. It’s an exacting method, dependent on competently trained teachers with years of in-depth studies to ensure efficacy of this practice. Pilates training (not props classes) uses apparatus designed by Joseph Pilates himself, developed to comprehensively teach clients’ bodies and meet their unique needs and goals.

Accredited certification programs (often requiring more than 1,000 hours of training), produce the highest caliber teachers adept at training the body. Public beware. Classical Pilates trainers should be comprehensively certified by long-established institutions. They offer systematic and *safe* approaches to the Method, ensuring results-producing training using this most practical and personalized form of exercise available today.

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Pilates instructors need thorough training

Google "Pilates-related injuries" and you'll find statistics show less than 40 percent of the reported 16,000 Pilates instructors are adequately trained; the remainder lack important pre-screening skills and knowledge of movement modifications to suit students' varying ability levels, musculoskeletal problems and cardiovascular conditions. As popularity of this method grows, so has its reputation for being unsafe.

The prevalence of Pilates mat classes with large numbers of students and only one instructor add to potential serious injuries, making it virtually impossible for participants to receive the individualized attention and supervision required to ensure effective and safe training. Pilates often is alluring (even in equipment-filled studios where certified trainers are nonexistent). It combines archaic-looking constructions with beautifully crafted wood frames and springs.

We're all susceptible to new and Hollywood-hyped experiences, jumping at the chance to say we have tried them. But as the number of Pilates offerings skyrocket, the odds of someone using improper techniques or moving beyond their body's healthy range of motion increases exponentially with lack of proper supervision.

Classical Pilates is a highly complex approach to fitness based on a proven philosophy of holistic health. Its equipment and exercises are designed to gradually and appropriately increase strength and flexibility. Based on specific breathing techniques; low-impact exercises; precise, flowing movement; and balance - targeting the deeper core muscles closest to the spine - authentic Pilates uniformly develops the body, regardless of age.

When taught by experienced and comprehensively certified instructors (undergoing at least 500 hours of training), Pilates is designed to safely facilitate any body type. Trainers taking weekend workshops, claiming certification to teach on specific Pilates' equipment or simply mat classes, often represent the greatest danger to students. They lack fundamental awareness of movement precautions and modifications to ensure the health and safety of their clients.

For those wanting to enjoy the many benefits of Pilates, do your homework. Expect nothing less than competently trained instructors to enjoy, in the words of Joseph Pilates, "naturally, easily and satisfactorily performing your many and varied daily tasks with spontaneous zest and pleasure."

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