



# Pilates: Both Physical and Mental

This article has been adapted by Eric Ferguson.



People who dance are easy to spot, even offstage. *“They’re very aware of their body’s position in space, and they move almost like cats,”* says Marie-Louise Bird, a Pilates researcher and post-doctoral research fellow at the University of British Columbia. *“But most of us are more like puppy dogs, moving without much attention paid to our posture.”*

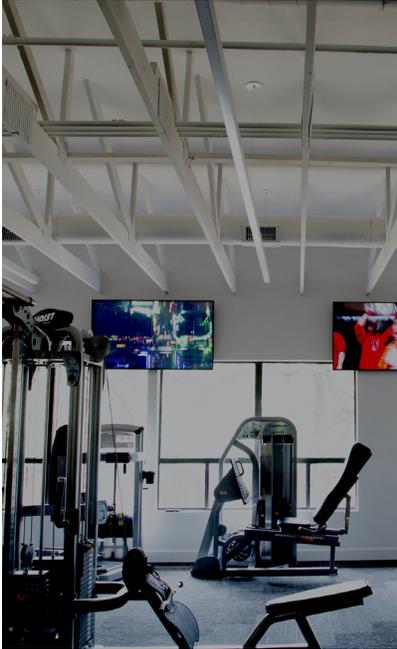
Luckily, the puppy dogs among us don’t have to go to dance school to get better body awareness. They can just do Pilates.



Ever since Joseph Pilates founded his studio in New York city about a century ago, the training method has focused on strengthening abdominal and trunk muscles—called the “core”—through hundreds of very specific movements. The first Pilates clients were ballet dancers looking for a way to improve their posture and control their movements.

Pilates looks deceptively easy. The often-tiny movements improve balance and core strength, Bird’s research suggests. *“Pilates does this in part by reinforcing the bond between mind and muscles, helping people engage the right muscles in the core. This leads to better posture and control over the body’s movements,”* says Cherie Wells, a senior lecturer in physical therapy at Australia’s Griffith University. Wells’ research has found that the core-strengthening perks of Pilates may also ease pain and improve daily life for people suffering from chronic low-back pain.





Some research has also linked Pilates to better flexibility, trunk stability, injury prevention, and athletic performance. (Some former and current NFL players, including Antonio Brown and Martellus Bennett, are fans.)

*"It is easy to do Pilates incorrectly, so if you want to experience all these advantages, good form is essential,"* Bird says. That requires a good teacher, at least in the beginning. *"Results come from a structured class taught by a certified instructor,"* says Ann Gibson, an associate professor of exercise science at the University of New Mexico, who warns newbies not to assume they can pick up Pilates by looking at a few online pictures or guides. *"There needs to be a lot of focus on rolling down or up from the ground, one vertebrae at a time."* The other unique part of Pilates isn't physical but mental. One of the key concepts of Pilates is called "centering," or understanding that all movements originate in your core. *"Like yoga, it's about breathing and focus and being mindful of your body's movements,"* Gibson says.<sup>1</sup>

*"It's probably not the best workout for those looking for a vigorous sweat,"* says Wells. Newer forms of the practice use machines to increase resistance and even aerobic intensity—reformer Pilates and jumpboard Pilates are two examples—but they're less studied than the traditional forms of the exercise.<sup>2</sup>



## PILATES AT THE CONTINUUM METHOD

Banks Cooney has recently joined the TCM team as a Pilates instructor.

Banks has a Bachelors degree in Dance from the University of Arizona and a Bachelors degree in Kinesiology from St. Edwards University. She has worked as a Pilates, Barre, yoga, and ballet instructor.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Effectiveness of Pilates Exercise in People with Chronic Low Back Pain: A Systematic Review* Wells C, Kolt GS, Marshall P, Hill B, Bialocerkowski

<sup>2</sup>Segal NA, Hein J, Basford JR. The effects of Pilates training on flexibility and body composition: an observational study. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2004;85:1977–81.

