

good moves

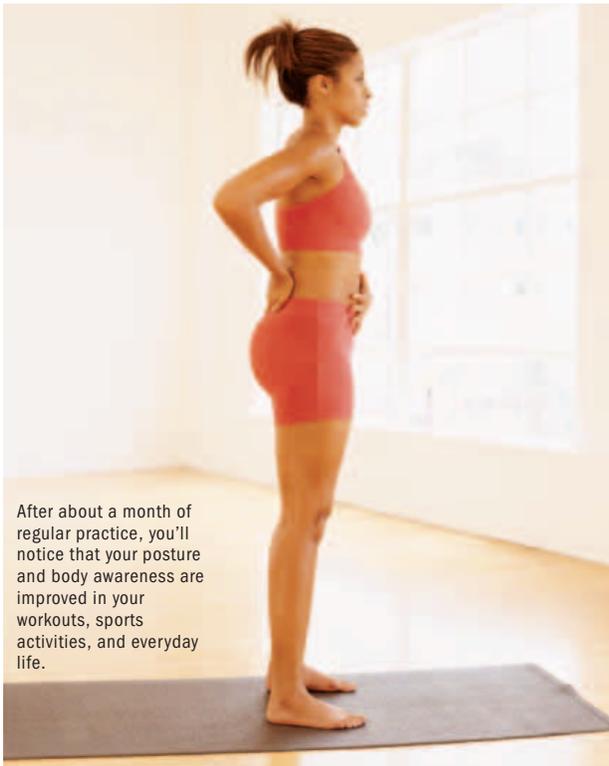
personal coach
pilates



By Jillian Hessel

The Pilates Breath

Joseph Pilates believed consistent deep breathing was integral to good health. Focusing on the breath while doing each movement requires intense mental concentration and physical control, and one result is improved respiratory function. Practice breathing 5 to 10 times before you begin the exercises. Sit cross-legged on your mat. Place your palms on your lower abdomen, fingers spread apart. Inhale deeply through the nose without raising your shoulders, then pull the lower abs up and into your spine as you exhale through your mouth. Your fingertips should move closer together as you exhale. Count to 5 as you inhale, and count to 5 again as you exhale.



After about a month of regular practice, you'll notice that your posture and body awareness are improved in your workouts, sports activities, and everyday life.

Find Your Powerhouse

Before you begin, find your powerhouse, which should be engaged during all pilates exercises. Standing tall, imagine a marionette string suspended from the top of your head to the ceiling, pulling upward. Place the palm of one hand on your lower abdomen, and the other palm on your lower back. Inhale deeply through your nose, and exhale through the mouth, pulling your lower abs up and in. Practice several times. Then, simultaneously draw your buttocks together and your pelvic floor muscles up as you exhale through your mouth (imagine you have a full bladder and are trying to hold it in).

Pilates' Inspiration Because Pilates studied movement

methods such as yoga, gymnastics, and martial arts, many pilates exercises show traces of these disciplines. Yoga and pilates both emphasize deep breathing, and some pilates movements resemble yoga poses. There are differences, however. Yoga ranges from static postures to fast-moving sequences, while pilates emphasizes slow, controlled movements that strengthen the powerhouse.

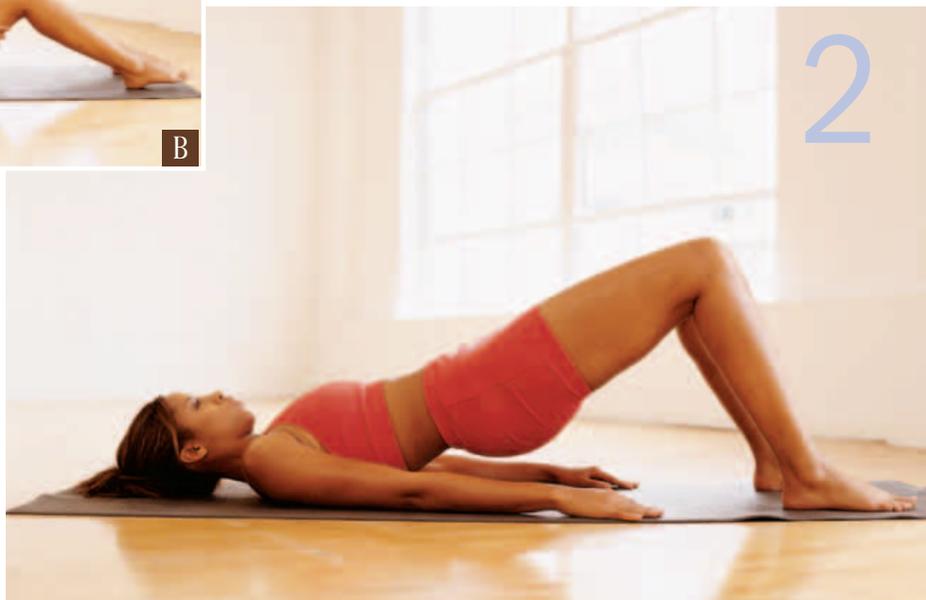
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Roll-Down to the Floor

This exercise implements “imprinting,” or moving your spine up or down one vertebra at a time. It increases the spine’s flexibility and strengthens the powerhouse.

Begin seated with legs in front of you, knees bent, feet hip-width apart. Place your palms on the backs of your thighs, close to your knees. Inhale deeply (A). Begin exhaling, and scoop your lower abs as you curl the tailbone under. Complete your exhale as you walk the hands down your thighs (B), lowering yourself one vertebra at a time until you are lying down (legs remain bent). Inhale, then exhale to rise again, one vertebra at a time, to sitting position. Do 6 times.



Pelvic Press

This move strengthens the buttocks and hamstrings, and lengthens the spine.

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet hip-width apart. Stretch your arms on the ground at your sides, palms down. Inhale. Begin exhaling as you scoop up your lower abs, tilting your pubic bone up and pressing the small of your back into the mat. Continue exhaling as you squeeze your buttocks together, peeling your spine away from the mat vertebra by vertebra. Finish exhaling as you reach the top of the press. Don’t roll too high—make sure you’re working the abs, buttocks, and backs of the legs, not the lower back. Inhale while holding the press, then exhale to roll down. Do 5 to 10 times.

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A

Breathing 100s

This classic pilates exercise works almost every muscle in the body. Lie down and fold your knees into your chest, with feet softly pointed and hands on backs of thighs (A). Inhale. As you exhale from the lower abs, extend your legs, pointing feet, and roll your head and shoulders off the mat, keeping your abs tight and avoiding arching your back. If you're uncomfortable, bend knees slightly. Extend your arms alongside your body, palms hovering just above the floor (B). Exhale completely as you arrive in this position. Keep your neck relaxed and your shoulders away from your ears. Breathe in for 5 counts and out for 5 counts, pumping your outstretched arms up and down a few inches with each count. Do 10 times for a total of 100 arm beats. Inhale as you return to your original position to rest for a moment.

3



B

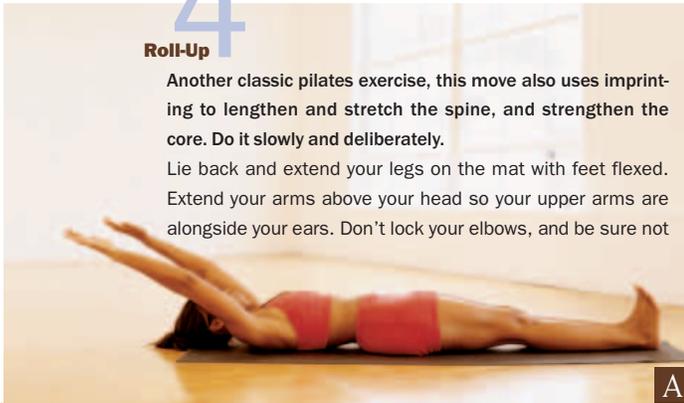
4

Roll-Up

Another classic pilates exercise, this move also uses imprinting to lengthen and stretch the spine, and strengthen the core. Do it slowly and deliberately.

Lie back and extend your legs on the mat with feet flexed. Extend your arms above your head so your upper arms are alongside your ears. Don't lock your elbows, and be sure not

to overarch your back (A). Inhale and extend your arms to the ceiling, keeping your shoulders down (B). Exhale and peel your spine off the mat, vertebra by vertebra. Scoop your lower belly, and bend your knees if you need to. Continue to roll the spine up to a seated position with arms extended in front of you, parallel to the legs; you'll be looking down at your thighs (C). Inhale as you roll the spine back down to the floor, and exhale to raise the arms to their outstretched position. Do 6 to 10 times.



A

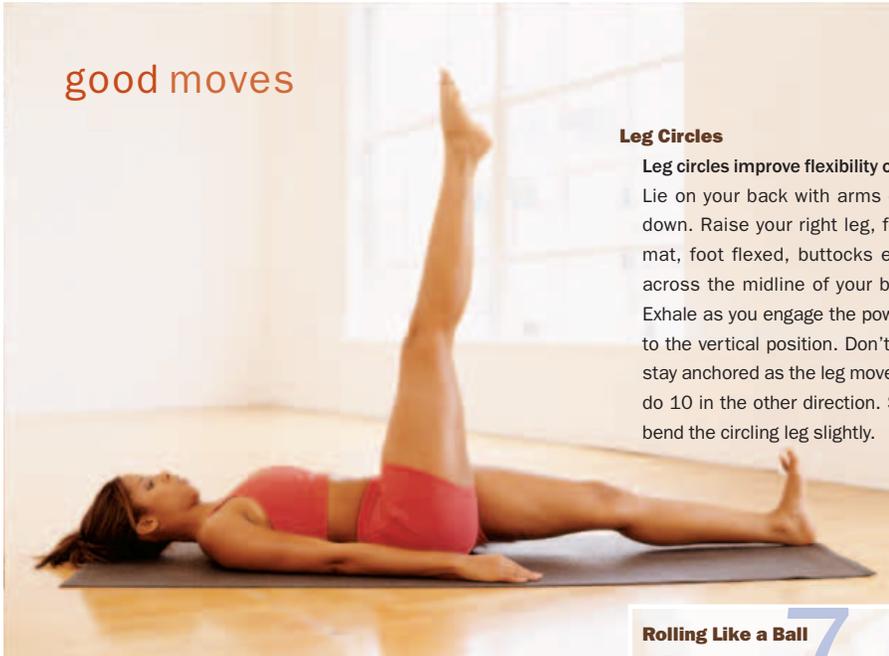


B



C

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Leg Circles

Leg circles improve flexibility of the hip joint and stabilize the pelvis.

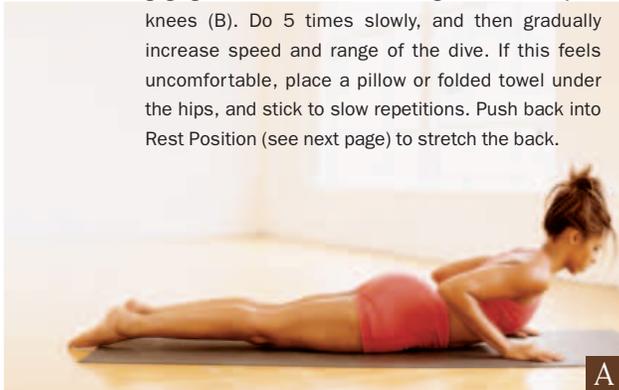
Lie on your back with arms extended at the sides of your body, palms down. Raise your right leg, foot pointed. Keep left leg extended on the mat, foot flexed, buttocks engaged. Inhale as you bring your right leg across the midline of your body and circle it down and away from you. Exhale as you engage the powerhouse to continue the leg circle, returning to the vertical position. Don't make the circle too big—your pelvis should stay anchored as the leg moves. Complete 10 circles in one direction, then do 10 in the other direction. Switch legs and repeat. If you're a beginner, bend the circling leg slightly.

5

Swan Dive

The swan dive works the backs of your legs, buttocks, and back. Begin slowly and concentrate on lengthening your body along the mat.

Lie facedown and place the palms of your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Elbows should be bent off the floor and hugged tightly into your sides. Squeeze your legs together, toes pointed, and engage your powerhouse. Inhale as you press the palms of the hands into the mat, lifting your arms and upper body to hover off the floor, keeping the line of the neck long, as far as it's comfortable (A). Exhale and rock the upper body toward the floor, and lift your legs off the floor by engaging the buttocks and hamstrings. Don't bend your knees (B). Do 5 times slowly, and then gradually increase speed and range of the dive. If this feels uncomfortable, place a pillow or folded towel under the hips, and stick to slow repetitions. Push back into Rest Position (see next page) to stretch the back.



A

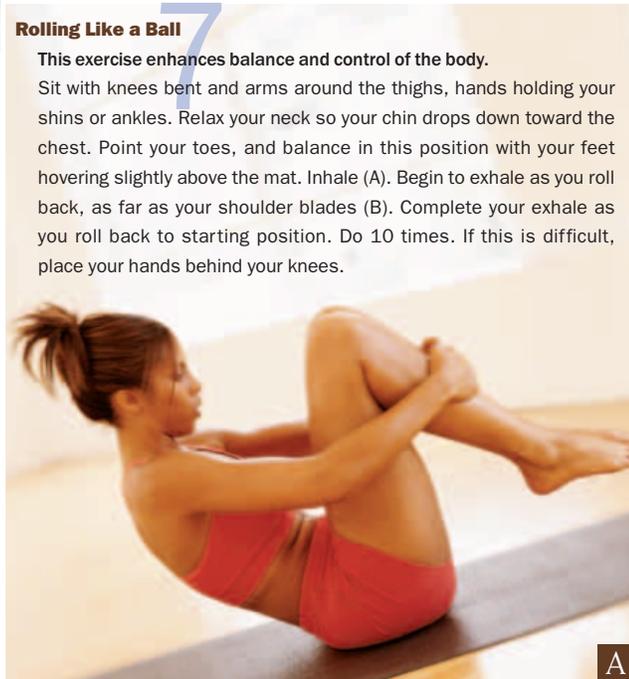


B

Rolling Like a Ball

This exercise enhances balance and control of the body.

Sit with knees bent and arms around the thighs, hands holding your shins or ankles. Relax your neck so your chin drops down toward the chest. Point your toes, and balance in this position with your feet hovering slightly above the mat. Inhale (A). Begin to exhale as you roll back, as far as your shoulder blades (B). Complete your exhale as you roll back to starting position. Do 10 times. If this is difficult, place your hands behind your knees.

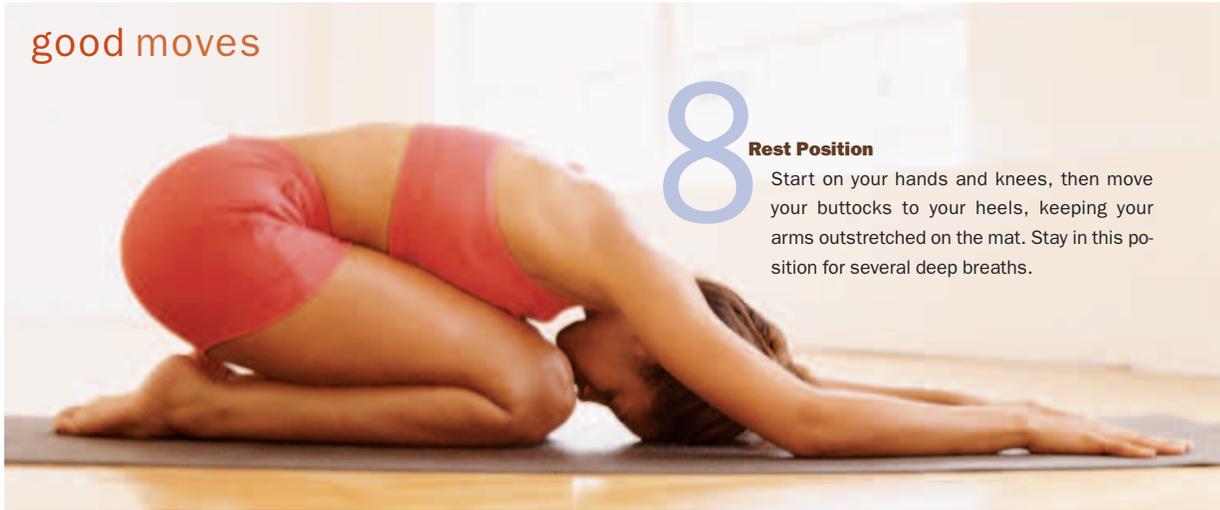


A



B

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8

Rest Position

Start on your hands and knees, then move your buttocks to your heels, keeping your arms outstretched on the mat. Stay in this position for several deep breaths.

Side Leg Kicks

9

This move works all the muscles in your legs.

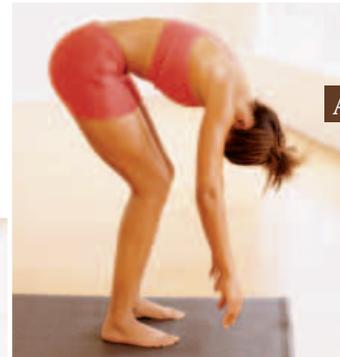
Lie on your left side, aligning your left elbow, shoulder, and hip with the back edge of the mat. Support your head with the left hand, and prop the right hand on the floor in front of you. Flex your feet and extend your legs diagonally across the mat so they reach the front edge. Lift your right leg to hip height, engage your powerhouse, and exhale. Inhale to kick forward slowly (A). Exhale as you point the foot and sweep the leg behind you (B). Be careful not to kick too far and overarch the lower back. Continue in a steady movement for 10 repetitions, then repeat on the right side. If this move makes your neck feel uncomfortable, place a folded towel between the left ear and upper arm.



Posture/Balance

To complete your pilates routine, return briefly to Rest Position.

After breathing a few times, tuck your toes under and push back into a low squat, with fingertips lightly touching the floor. Drop your chin so it's relaxed toward the chest. Slowly rise from the squat position by pushing your heels toward the floor until your torso hangs forward and down. Keep the knees slightly bent and aligned over the center of each foot. Breathe, relax the upper body, and hang like a rag doll (A). Inhale in this position. Exhale as you engage



your powerhouse and slowly roll up to a standing position. When you are standing, straighten your knees with your arms relaxed at your sides. Inhale once again, and as you exhale, rise slowly to balance on the balls of your feet (B). Breathe, relax the shoulders, and maintain this balance for several seconds.