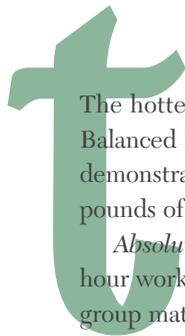


arc angel



can one prop really fit all?
jillian hessel makes a good case
for the versatile **arc**



The hottest item at last November's PMA conference in Phoenix? Balanced Body's Pilates Arc, which was such a big hit that half of the demonstration models were scooped up on the spot. But do these four pounds of foam deserve the accolades they're receiving?

Absolutely, says master teacher Jillian Hessel, who taught three two-hour workshops on the Arc at that very conference. "The Arc can make group mat classes more exciting and challenging because its rounded shape alters your body's starting position, which enables you to move in different planes," she says. "You are constantly working against gravity—either 'uphill' or 'downhill,' so your muscles are engaged in a different way."

Even a simple Roll-up involves a greater new range of motion and therefore different muscle recruitment on the Arc, Hessel notes. It also invites teachers to get more creative by forcing them to slightly alter standard mat exercises—sometimes even inventing new ones, she points out.

The brainchild of Balanced Body's design team, the Arc was introduced a year ago, explains Lynne Johnson, senior marketing manager of the company. It was designed to be a less-expensive, portable version of the Step Barrel (\$159, compared with \$350–\$450). Not only is it lightweight, but the barrel and the step can be taken apart, which makes it easy to store. This makes it a good option for group exercise classes in studios or gyms with limited space as well as home exercisers. The rounded part of the Arc can also be used as a prop on the Reformer or Cadillac.

When the arc is separated from the step, it can be flipped upside-down and used for balance and core-stabilization exercises. "These balance exercises help to keep your mental focus sharp, one of Joseph Pilates' key principles," explains Hessel, who offers the following "insider tip": Buy some nonskid black rubber padding (like the kind placed under area rugs) from your local hardware store and use an X-Acto knife to cut out a piece the exact size of the Arc. "This gives it some padding and helps keep you from slipping when you're working on it," she says.

Her one reservation about the Arc: Certain exercises work better for particular body types. For people with shorter torsos, the Arc may have too shallow a curve. But for people with less-flexible spines and larger clients who don't fit on the standard Step Barrel, the Arc is a perfect fit, she notes. To get you started, here's a sampling of exercises that can be done on the Arc.



Known throughout the industry as "the teacher's teacher," **Jillian Hessel** has trained and certified countless Pilates instructors over the years. She's a Gold-certified instructor through the Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) and a charter member of our advisory board. Hessel travels to teach guest workshops at private studios throughout the U.S. and internationally. She is also certified as a health/fitness instructor through the American Council on Exercise (ACE) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and holds a UCLA Extension certification as well. She has produced six DVDs, as well as a series with Gaiam, and has authored *Pilates Basics* (Rodale Press and Gaiam). **For more information, visit jillianhessel.com.**

SERIES OF FIVE

targeted muscles: this intense abdominal “superset” warms up the entire body

1. single-leg stretch

a. Perch your sitz bones on the very edge of the seat. Roll your upper back toward the Arc, so the back of your ribs rest on the curve. (There will be a hollow space under your lower back.) Draw your left knee toward your left ear and extend your right leg out straight, maintaining a deep scoop in your lower abs.

b. Inhale as you switch positions of your legs and exhale as you draw the opposite knee in tightly toward your ear. Keep your legs parallel, in line with the hips. Perform 8–10 reps with pointed feet, and then another 8–10 with flexed feet.

2. double-leg stretch

a. Sit on the edge of the seat, with your ribs resting on the curve.

b. Draw both knees in tightly toward your ears, hands on the shins or ankles. Inhale and extend your arms alongside your ears, keeping your legs parallel. Hold your breath as you circle your arms out to the sides at shoulder height. Exhale to engage your lower abs, and then draw your legs and arms back to start position. Perform 5 reps.





3. SINGLE STRAIGHT-LEG STRETCH

a. Starting in the same position as the first two exercises, extend one leg straight from the hip, parallel with the floor. Extend the other leg toward the ceiling and grasp it with both hands. Make sure both legs are rotated slightly out.

b. Inhale as switch the positions of your legs and exhale as you draw the opposite leg in tightly toward you. Perform 8–10 reps with pointed feet, and then 8–10 reps with flexed feet.



4. DOUBLE STRAIGHT-LEG STRETCH

a. Place your hands behind your head and extend both legs away from your body in slight external rotation.

b. Inhale before you begin. Exhale, engaging your deepest lower abdominals to perform a small posterior pelvic tilt, drawing both of your legs closer to you. Inhale to release. Perform 10 reps.



5. CRISS-CROSS

a. Place both hands behind your head and draw one knee in toward your ear, as in Single-Leg Stretch. Rotate your upper body and the opposite elbow toward your bent knee. Extend your other leg straight out from the hip.

b. Inhale as your knees pass each other and exhale as you bring your opposite knee in tightly toward your ear, switching the rotation of the upper body (opposite elbow to opposite knee).

Note: Keep legs in parallel and in line with the hips at all times. Perform 8–10 reps with pointed feet, and then another 8–10 reps with flexed feet.

DIAMOND LEG LIFTS

targeted muscles: glutes, hip extensors

a. Balance your torso prone on the Arc, hands on the floor in front of you, knees bent with feet pointed toward the ceiling.

b. Exhale as you engage the glutes and hip extensors and push your feet toward the ceiling. Repeat 25 times.

Tip: You should not feel this in your lower back; if you do, reposition yourself on the Arc.



SWIMMING



targeted muscles: entire body, especially the posterior muscles

a. Lie prone on the Arc, with arms extended alongside your ears and legs extended straight out from the hips.

b. Quickly alternate opposite arm and leg lifts in a flutter kick and swimming motion. Breathe deeply and naturally. Perform 25 reps.

SIDE-LYING LEG SERIES

targeted muscles: tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius, hip extensors

1. STRAIGHT-LEG LIFTS

a. Lie on the Arc on your side with your top leg extended in line with the hip, bottom leg folded in front. Place your bottom arm on Arc to support your head.



b. With foot flexed in parallel, lift to hip height. Point foot and lower to start position. Perform 4 reps. Perform 4 more reps lifting with a pointed foot and lowering with a flexed foot.



2. SIDE-LEG KICKS

a. Lie on your side on the Arc. Lift leg to hip height with pointed foot.

b. Kick leg to front with a flexed foot as you inhale.

c. Kick leg to back with a pointed foot as you exhale. Perform 8–10 reps.



3. LEG CIRCLES

setup: Start in the same position as Side-Leg Kicks.

a. Circle your leg to the front, then up in the air to the side, and lower in slight extension behind you. Perform 3–5 reps, and then reverse the circle. Do not swing the leg—use control.





MERMAID

targeted muscles: the entire side of the body

a. Lie on your side on the Arc with your top leg extended on the floor and your foot flexed. Extend your arms overhead, with palms facing each other.

b. Lift your upper body off the Arc, extending as long as you can to trace the widest possible arc in the air with your fingertips. Pressing into the floor with the top foot will help anchor you.

c/d. When you reach the apex of the movement, fold the top leg in with a pointed foot, and continue to arch into a side bend in the opposite direction, draping your top arm over your head. Return slowly to the start position and repeat 3–5 times.

Tip: Do not use momentum to hoist yourself up, and do not fall down onto the Arc in the reverse motion.



tree

targeted muscles: stretches the hip and hamstring of the working leg; works the muscles of the torso to hold the body upright

a. Sit sideways on the step of the Arc with your right leg folded in. Grasp your left instep, heel or lower leg with your hand.



B. Extend your left leg straight to the front, and then open it out to the side, sitting up tall in your torso. (Don't lean to the side.) Perform 3 reps, then hold onto your working leg in front with both hands to stretch more deeply. Relax and repeat on the other side. 🌀