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Two Great Pilates Foot-Training Tools

by Jillian Hessel

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Small Equipment: Help clients restore and maintain toe, foot and ankle mobility with two small, ingenious devices designed by Joseph Pilates.



Joseph Pilates designed two spring-loaded tools for strengthening and maintaining mobility in the ankles, feet and toes. His foot corrector and toe tensometer may not be the best-known Pilates devices, but today's rapidly evolving exercise industry offers many solid reasons to give these clever tools a second look.

For starters, interest in maintaining healthy feet is growing in the Pilates profession and beyond. Swimming, diving, yoga and other Eastern practices like tai chi used to be the only forms of barefoot exercise for the general public. Now, barefoot running and other forms of barefoot exercise—such as barre workouts and willPower & grace®—are growing more popular.

Whether shod or barefoot, active people need strong, pliant feet to run.

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jump, move laterally, perform well and prevent injury. "Think of your body as a building. The feet are the foundation," said Carola S. Trier, the first Pilates student to open her own Body Contrology Studio, in her book *Exercise: What It Is, What It Does* (Greenwillow 1982). The foot corrector and toe tensometer were specifically designed to build a strong foundation

in the feet.

Many of our clients have foot injuries like ankle sprains or plantar fasciitis. Clients also have chronic conditions such as collapsed arches, dropped metatarsals, bunions, Achilles tendonitis and hammer toes. Older adults, a rapidly growing fitness population, want to maintain balance and mobility so they can stay active well into their 70s, 80s and 90s.

Performing these all-important functions must begin with our connection to the ground—the feet. This is where the foot corrector and toe tensometer can help.

A Closer Look at the Foot Corrector

Let's begin by examining how the original foot corrector enhances foot/ankle mobility while encouraging core stability and proper body alignment. The foot corrector uses a flat wood or metal base. A rounded, saddle-like piece of metal spans the center of the base and is attached to two long bolts encased in springs on either side of the saddle. The springs allow variable resistance when the client presses a foot down against the saddle.

It's a good idea to hold onto a barre or a high-backed chair when you first begin working with the foot corrector, as maintaining whole-body balance can be challenging. Stand with one foot flat on the ground alongside the base of the apparatus, and place the heel of the working foot onto the base so your five metatarsals are arranged horizontally across the saddle.

Dorsiflex the ankle, opening the toes wide, and then slowly plantar-flex the ankle, depressing the saddle with the forefoot. Do this three times, and then move the heel slightly closer to the saddle and repeat three more times. Gradually, the heel of the working foot will have to rise as you massage the arch of the foot up and over the top of the saddle. Eventually, the toes will land on the other side of the base, and you will continue to press the saddle down, this time with your heel.

The real trick is to press the saddle down while maintaining correct foot alignment and whole-body alignment. Avoid rocking the body as you depress the saddle; instead, concentrate on the ankle, foot and toe action. Always remember to release the saddle slowly, resisting the recoil of the spring, and keep spreading the toes apart as much as possible to strengthen and stretch the transverse arch of the foot.

A Closer Look at the Toe Tensometer

The toe tensometer works specifically in the forefoot and the toes, and it can be especially helpful with bunions, hammer toes and dropped metatarsals. It consists of two sewn loops of leather connected by a small spring device.

To begin, sit up tall at the edge of a firm chair, legs hip-width apart, and place the two loops of the toe tensometer around each big toe. Press the heels into the floor and lift both feet into dorsiflexion. Spread all 10 toes apart, without moving the legs apart, and gently "drum" the toe tips to the floor, placing first the pinkie toe, then the fourth toe, and then the third, second and great toe, one at a time, as if playing the scales on a piano. Work to "dome" the transverse arch of the foot and try to "show" the knuckles of each toe through your skin. Relax back to the start position and repeat.

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You are probably already considering clients who could benefit from these exercises. So, how much do the devices cost? A quick Google search shows that the foot corrector is generally priced in the \$145-\$190 range, plus shipping. The price varies because of differences in construction materials. The metal base is the original Joseph Pilates design; the wood base costs a bit less.

If you choose the wood base, make sure the hips remain level throughout the exercises, as the wood base is thicker than the metal one. Some models also come with two sets of interchangeable springs with lighter and heavier tensions. This is a nice feature if your clients have different foot strengths, but beware: The springs do not change out quickly.

The toe tensometer will cost \$80-\$110. Yes, this may seem a bit expensive at first for such a small device, but it is a precision-crafted piece with multiple moving metal parts and a spring. The toe tensometer is a small replica of the head harness, a mechanical apparatus designed to strengthen and stretch the neck muscles. A properly constructed toe tensometer is like a valuable old Swiss timepiece.

If you are interested in finding out more, check out the resources below. Balanced Body®, www.pilates.com
Gratz Pilates, www.pilates-gratz.com
Pilates Designs by Basil, www.pilatesdesignsbybasil.com
Peak Pilates®, www.peakpilates.com

SIDEBAR: Video Clips

The following videos demonstrate proper use of the foot corrector and toe tensometer:

- The Foot Corrector with Elizabeth Larkam, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnGEKgfFkGI&list=PL80526803970FDF8E&index=5
- The Toe Tensometer with Lori Coleman Brown, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oLJVYwjuWo



Jillian Hessel

IDEA Author/Presenter



I am a retired ballet dancer. My passion is health & fitness, and helping people get into the best ... [more](#)

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This is a raw, unedited video filmed live at the 2009 IDEA World Fitness Convention™. Cut to the Core is packed full of core-focused exercises that aim to improve the way you look, feel and live.

September 2011 IDEA Fitness Journal Quiz 4: Plyometric Training



This continuing education quiz is an in-depth look at plyometric training. Plyometric exercises—jumping, bounding, hopping, arm pushing, and catching and throwing weighted objects such as machine balls—are movements that involve rapid eccentric and concentric muscle actions.

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