



Introducing the power of Pilates

Hello and welcome to Fitness Matters. I hope you are enjoying my articles and they are inspiring you to make physical activity a regular part of your life. This time I'm turning to Pilates, which has become hugely popular in recent years. This exercise system can be of immense benefit to peri and postmenopausal women and there is an abundance of classes available in gyms, leisure centres and community venues.

So how can Pilates help me? While many of us are drawn to Pilates in our quest for improved abs, there are many compelling reasons to make Pilates a regular part of your fitness programmes.

Core strength
One particularly unwelcome effect of menopause and the ageing process is weight gain and the increased deposition of fat around the visceral area with a shift to an androgynous body shape. As well as an increased risk of cardiovascular

Fitness expert Kathleen Stewart looks at the benefits of Pilates to women around menopause



and metabolic disorders, this can create a confidence crisis, negative body image and difficulty in dressing as we desire.

By emphasising the correct recruitment and activation of our core muscles, Pilates can help us achieve a tighter and defined mid-section, although additional cardiovascular exercise and nutritional intervention will be needed to shift stubborn fat deposits.

Total body conditioning
For those who do not like the traditional resistance training, Pilates can be an exciting alternative as body weight is used as resistance. A well-structured RT programme is

key to maintaining and increasing muscle mass and boosting metabolism, even when our bodies are resting. And as a bonus, it can contribute to decreases in total and abdominal body fat. Increased bone density is an important additional benefit.

Improved flexibility
Menopausal transition for many women is accompanied by a loss of joint range of movement and stiffness. This has adverse consequences for our ability to carry out everyday activities and a limiting effect on sports and exercise performance. By working through a full range of move-

ment during Pilates exercises, flexibility will be enhanced.
Balance and posture
Pilates is a balanced, total body workout, which will increase postural awareness and correct muscle imbalances that can lead to poor posture. Some exercises will improve balance and coordination, which can help prevent catastrophic falls in later life.

Psychological benefits
Pilates has positive psychological effects. At this challenging time in our lives, a loss of mental clarity, focus and motivation are common. Unlike some fitness programmes, Pilates engages our minds as well as bodies as a great deal of emphasis is placed on correct body alignment and controlled execution of the moves.

In the words of the creator of the exercise procedure, Joseph Pilates, he says: "Pilates develops the body uniformly, corrects wrong postures, restores physical vitality, invigorates the mind and ele-

vates the spirit." Lots of reasons for giving this system a go.

Here are three body exercises for you to try. Perform them in a controlled, focused manner, breathing out on the exertion and in on the return phase. Repeat each exercise 8-16 times.

Shoulder bridge

Lie on your back in neutral spine (lower back slightly off floor) with legs shoulder-width apart, knees bent and arms on the floor by your sides. Arms can be raised over shoulders. Squeeze glutes and slowly lift hips off floor as shown, simultaneously raising arms above head. Hold for a few seconds and return to start position.

Heel slide

Lift head and shoulders off the floor, keeping chin tucked in. Don't allow your head to fall back. Slowly slide your heel along floor until your leg is straight while simultaneously extending opposite arm overhead and lowering your head

and shoulders to the floor.

Stretch as far as possible and hold. Slowly slide heel in to start position while curling off floor and returning arm to start. Repeat on other side.

Torso twist

Lie on your back with legs in table top position, head and shoulders off the floor. Your lower back will be in contact with the floor. Keeping abs tight, twist torso aiming head and shoulders towards opposite knee, while extending other leg away from your body. Knees can be straight or slightly bent. Return to start and repeat on other side.

NEXT ISSUE

I'll be looking at body conditioning for women in and around the menopause. Meantime, feel free to contact me on kathleen@katsfitness.co.uk if you have any questions or visit www.katsfitness.co.uk.