

FITNESS FACTS

Pilates: Great Exercise Or Great Hype?

by Liz Neporent

(NAPSA)—Somehow, an exercise originally meant to help wounded soldiers caught on with Jennifer Aniston, then Oprah and then just about everybody else in America. But is Pilates really right for everyone? Here's a closer look:

What Is Pilates?

Pilates (pronounced Puh-Lat-Eez) is a series of low-impact exercises meant to strengthen core muscles—namely, your abs and lower back. Individual Pilates exercises emphasize stretching and body movements and don't require traditional weights.

What Pilates Can And Can't Do

If your goal is to slim down, have firmer muscles, flatten your belly and reshape that entire torso area, then Pilates really can work wonders. In fact, it first caught on with dancers for exactly that reason. Also, if you're looking to reduce stress and strengthen bones, Pilates is worth your time.

But if you have a lot of weight to lose, Pilates alone won't do the trick. You'll have to pair it with cardio activities such as daily walks and cut some calories out of your diet. Do that and you'll be looking and feeling great in no time.

Who Can And Can't Do Pilates?

Pilates can be done by just about anyone, either in a gym or at home. For instance, Mat Pilates requires nothing more than bare feet, comfy clothes and an area about the size of a beach towel.

There are people who should avoid Pilates, though. For instance, Pilates isn't right for someone recovering from a severe back injury or someone with a significant misalignment in the spine. Also, while Pilates can be



Pilates first caught on with dancers because of how quickly it transformed their bodies.

done during pregnancy, it should only be done with a professional Pilates trainer, not on your own.

Getting Started

How can you give Pilates a try? Most health clubs and gyms offer Mat Pilates classes. You can also learn more about Pilates at www.pilatesstyle.com and www.pilates-pro.com, and if you want to try Pilates at home, there are plenty of DVDs to choose from.

The "Pick Your Level: Weight Loss Pilates" DVD is good because it's uniquely designed for all fitness levels—allowing each move to be done at a beginner, intermediate or advanced level. The DVD entitled "10 Minute Solution: Rapid Results Pilates" is also nice, because it offers five quick 10-minute workouts. Both are \$14.98 and available in stores and online at www.collegevideo.com.

• *Ms. Neporent is a member of the American Council on Exercise's Board Emeritus and author of "The Fat-Free Truth."*