

# Proven Benefits of Pilates

Did you know that Pilates continues to grow in popularity, and its practice is now familiar to people around the world? Maybe you've already experienced the effectiveness of Pilates or are thinking about taking lessons.

Good news! Researchers have proven certain benefits of this form of exercise. Shirley Archer, JD, MA, 2008 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year and IDEA's mind-body-spirit spokesperson, discusses the benefits below.

## **Benefits Backed by Strong Evidence**

To researchers, "strong evidence" means findings from multiple well-designed studies that include randomized, controlled trials. Here are the benefits proven by strong evidence:

**Improved flexibility.** Adult women who practiced Pilates mat work experienced improvements in posterior trunk flexibility (Sekendiz et al. 2007) and hamstring flexibility (Kloubec 2010) compared with control-group members who made no lifestyle changes. Among healthy young adults, mat Pilates participants improved low-back, hamstring and upper-body flexibility compared with active control subjects (Rogers & Gibson 2009). In a study of women over 60, Pilates practitioners gained flexibility in the hamstrings and low back, while those who remained inactive did not (Irez et al. 2011).

**Better dynamic balance.** With 5 weeks of Pilates equipment training, dynamic standing balance improved in healthy adults (average age, 27) compared with control subjects (Johnson et al. 2007). Women over 60 who took Pilates mat lessons for 12 weeks made gains in dynamic balance and reaction time and had fewer falls (Irez et al. 2011).

**More muscle endurance.** Female subjects who practiced Pilates mat work three times per week for 5 weeks improved abdominal muscle endurance compared with inactive controls (Sekendiz et al. 2007). Young healthy adults showed improvements in both abdominal and low-back muscle endurance after 8 weeks of classes, three times a week; the control group consisted of unsupervised active young adults (Rogers & Gibson 2009). In a study with both younger and older adults, aged 25–65, abdominal and upper-body muscle endurance increased in those who took 12 weeks of Pilates classes, two times per week (Kloubec 2010).

## **Benefits Backed by Moderate Evidence**

Scientists have identified these additional effects from Pilates training, but more research is needed to confirm the findings:

**More life satisfaction.** Women who participated in twice-weekly, 1-hour Pilates mat classes for 6 months enjoyed greater life satisfaction (Cruz-Ferreira et al. 2011a).

**Improved psychological well-being.** In addition to being more satisfied with their lives, these women improved their physical self-concept and health perception, contributing to

an improvement in overall psychological well-being (Cruz-Ferreira et al. 2011a). Self-efficacy, mood and sleep quality improved in college students who practiced Pilates for one 15-week semester (Caldwell et al. 2009).

### **How Much Practice is Required**

To get the most benefit from a Pilates routine, research evidence suggests that if you are healthy you should train two to three times a week for at least an hour per session. Most Pilates study designs have required subjects to do the exercises for at least 50 minutes, two to three times a week, over 5–15 weeks (Cruz-Ferreira et al. 2011b).

When it comes to an exercise plan to ensure particular results, investigators look for a “dose-response” relationship. In scientific terms, this means a change in effect on a subject, caused by differing levels of exposure (or dose) to a stressor (in this case, the exercise program) over a certain period of time.

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