



# Where It's Mat

MAT PILATES POSITIONS, FROM L-R: ROLLOVER PREP ON ROLLER AND BICYCLE PREP ON ROLLER.

Pilates mat classes are based on a series of floor work exercises developed by Joseph H. Pilates. The mat is where clients learn the all important foundation for the entire Pilates repertoire. Kathleen Keller explains that it is a vital and integral part of a complete system of exercise.

SPECIAL THANKS TO CYBERVIEW LODGE RESORT & SPA FOR PROVIDING THE LOCATION.

Joseph Pilates began to develop his exercise philosophy of “Contrology” in the early 1920’s. He opened his first New York studio in the late 1920’s focusing on increasing strength and flexibility, improving posture, toning the body through deep muscle control and exercising the body as a whole. This immediately attracted the attention of the professional dance community. Zeroing in on their training technique weaknesses he helped them achieve bodies resistant to injury and strain. For decades now dancers, athletes and the general public have used Pilates as a method for stretching, strengthening and rebalancing the body.

Pilates is a system of exercises utilizing apparatus such as the Reformer, Cadillac, Chair, Barrels and the Mat work. It is scientifically based and focuses on shoulder girdle and pelvis

stabilization, spinal mobility, core strength, flexibility, balance and co-ordination. When using the equipment we have access to a complex system of levers, suspension, resistance and assistance to help us build strength and improve flexibility in a supported environment. If you are doing Pilates without any of the equipment mentioned above, then you are involved in a portion of the system called the Mat Work. The exercises range from beginner to super advanced. They do not require anything except a Mat, although some classes may incorporate small apparatus such as Rollers, Magic Circle and Thera-bands.

#### What should I do first Equipment or Mat?

Maybe its because the equipment looks rather medieval and torturous but some people assume that because there is no

equipment involved with the Mat that this means it is easier. Actually the reverse is true. Make no mistake about it the Mat work is tough; it is you against gravity, using your body weight as resistance the whole way. Unless you are already relatively fit and injury free, doing the exercises on the Mat may just be too difficult and strenuous at first. Prime target areas for injury with a de-conditioned individual doing Mat classes are the areas of the neck and the lower back.

When we use the Pilates equipment we have a myriad of options to choose from in order to help the client eventually be able to perform the Mat exercises correctly without undue strain. The apparatus aids in developing muscular strength and flexibility gradually with proper alignment and less muscular tension. The Mat is an integral part of a whole system and the foundation for all the work. If you are taking equipment sessions a good instructor will also be include some of the Mat and integrate this into your program.

Please be clear though, the equipment is **not** just for the Beginner level. The work here can be made difficult enough to make an elite athlete beg for mercy. If someone is fit enough to do a strong beginner Mat workout, this means they are ready to tackle the Intermediate/Advanced work on the equipment. With all the options we have to increase or decrease resistance

and /or gravity, there is no shortage of repertoire to challenge you on the apparatus.

#### How do I know if my Mat class is a good one?

The first few sessions should be devoted to the principles of the work which are: breath, pelvis, ribcage and neck placement, shoulder organization, spinal articulation, accessing the all important deep Transversus Abdominals and Pelvic Floor muscles, control and precision in movement, alignment, fluidity and concentration. In the beginning it should be about heightening your body awareness, not just pushing through some movements. The work is progressive; every time you come, you should be building on what you learned the last time. If you are participating in a class where none of the above has been carefully and thoroughly explained and demonstrated to you, then you are not in a “real” Pilates class. You are just making some shapes with your body. In a series of Beginner classes in addition to the all important principles you should expect to be learning exercises such as : 100s, Roll-up, Leg Circles, Rolling like a Ball, Single-Leg Stretch, Double Leg Stretch, Spine Stretch, Saw, Spine Twist, Swan, Swimming, Breaststroke, Side Kicks, Side Lifts and the Seal.

#### Class Size and Dropping In

International standards dictate that Mat classes should not ▶

have more than 12 people. An instructor can not effectively cue and properly correct more than this many people at one time. The smaller the group the better the class will be as you will get more individual attention. Because it is progressive, it is recommended that Beginner level classes should be conducted as a consecutive series of 8-12 classes and on a pre-registered basis only.

From an instructor stand point, teaching a drop-in style Beginner class is a nightmare! Every time a new person attends the class this forces the instructor to slow right down and explain the principles yet again. This is where the people who have been coming on a regular basis become bored as they don't progress quickly enough. Worse yet, the instructor may not know (due to large class size) or ignores the fact that there are new people and the class progresses too quickly creating a serious potential for injury. In this scenario, you



SWAN WITH ROLLER AND SWAN WITH THORACIC ROTATION AND MAGIC CIRCLE.

can also bet that the principles are not being adhered to so the participants are unlikely to see results over time as well.

This is why Beginner classes are best lead when people commit to taking a consecutive series of 10 or 12 classes. Once one has a strong grasp of the foundation and principles they can attend Intermediate/Advanced classes on a drop-in basis with more complex and challenging exercises. There is no shortage of difficult exercises in the Pilates repertoire. Taking a class beyond your level of ability and understanding will only limit your progression and results and could lead to injury.



UPPER BODY WORK WITH THE MAGIC CIRCLE.

One of the greatest things about knowing the Mat work is that anywhere, anytime you can give yourself a workout! So if you are traveling or don't have time to come into the studio, there is never an excuse to let anything slide. Many clients combine Mat and Equipment sessions as part of a well rounded program. Mat classes also have the added benefit of being less expensive than equipment sessions and because they are in a group, they will provide some fun and variety. ●

## How Do I Know If My Instructor Is Qualified, Things To Ask And Notice

- Where did they get certified and what is the name of their Certification? Generally the closer in lineage the school is to Joseph Pilates himself, the more reputable the school.
- Do they have a web site where you can check the credentials of the people who taught them?
- Are they trained in all the Apparatus? Be wary if they are only trained in the Mat work, Pilates is a complete system and they will not have the depth of knowledge if they only know the Mat.
- How many hours did they apprentice? This means they were under the tutelage of an experienced and certified trainer, doing observation, practice teaching and self mastery. If they did not apprentice this is a red flag. If they are certified in all the equipment, a good apprenticeship program is at least 350 hours, if only trained in Mat (again not recommended) their apprenticeship should have been at least 40 hours.
- How many hours was the course? A good mat course should be at least 40 hours.
- Certification follow through, can you see their certificate?
- In a Beginner level class, the instructor should have clearly explained and demonstrated the principles, and reviews them consistently. The actual beginner exercises should be added slowly and reviewed in every session. By the end of an 8-12 week registered series you should know about 15 exercises.
- Intermediate/Advanced classes offered in a drop-in style are fine as long as every one in the class knows the fundamentals, the basic exercises and has been through the Beginner level.
- A good instructor does NOT participate in the class. Their job is

- to provide tactile and verbal cues and correct the class.
- Group size should be no more than 12.

How does Pilates compare to Yoga?

- Yoga is one of the many disciplines that Joseph Pilates studied so there are similarities. The Pilates Method gives you the stretching benefits of Yoga but because we use resistance springs you also get the added benefits of weight training.
- Yoga focuses the breath to the abdomen, while Pilates directs the breath to the sides and back of the lower rib cage. This modification of diaphragmatic breathing, allows optimal core abdominal strength while maximizing oxygen during exercise.
- Yoga may sometimes place the participant in an unnatural position, while in Pilates we concentrate more on functional movements to enable you to perform activities better in your day to day life.
- Doing Pilates will enable you to do your Yoga with a better understanding of where your body should be positioned and with a greater access to your core and stabilizing muscles.

Yogalates:

This is a fusion of the ancient discipline of yoga with the modern Pilates techniques, the exercises mix both disciplines to develop core strength, help tone muscles, increase flexibility and reduce stress. Yogalates is a trademarked name and exercise program by Australian Louise Solomon. Anyone teaching this must have express permission and must be teaching her technique.

Special thanks to Body Logic Pilates & Movement Studio (T: +603-4256 4689), Kuala Lumpur. For more information, log on to [www.bodylogicasia.com](http://www.bodylogicasia.com)