

# PILATES FOR MENOPAUSE ON THE CHAIR™



by  
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# INTRODUCTION

Menopause is an exciting and sometimes challenging time in a woman's life. A time of physical, emotional and spiritual change.

As movement specialists and/or clients, we can care for the menopausal body in ways that may help support these changes and some of the symptoms associated with it.

Over the last few years it has become apparent to me that menopausal women need a specific program that includes strength training (for bone health), cardiovascular workouts (for hormone balance and weight management), balance exercises and most importantly stretching and releasing, breathing and relaxation (for stress reduction, lymph drainage and resetting the para sympathetic nervous system). At this time most women should aim to remain active, toned and functional.

If you really want your body to continue to function well into your seventies and beyond, you have to start working smarter and this may be harder to do in the beginning as you learn to rethink your exercise program. Maybe you have lessened the resistance, lowered the heart rate and taken more breaks. Maybe you think you don't even need to exercise that much anymore? Maybe you think that at this age you should be slowing down and taking things easy?

## WELL THINK AGAIN!

As women today, we are so much more active, informed and focused on our health and fitness than we were several decades ago. Most of us have been exercising for years and we are not about to stop now that we are reaching a certain age. Life does not stop at fifty anymore. I personally, have found that I am better now because I understand my body better, I am not trying to be someone else and I am looking to remain functional and healthy. We can apply the philosophy and principles of Pilates to our exercise programs whether they are fitness, yoga or any other sport. Menopause brings about changes of the mind; changes in the body and a reawakening of the soul or spirit. It can be a truly amazing time if we have the tools necessary to cope with these changes. Pilates is a wonderful aid in accomplishing these goals. Keeping a positive attitude and sense of humor is important too.

# OVERVIEW

## WHAT IS MENOPAUSE CAUSED BY?

Menopause is said to be reached when a woman has not had a period for twelve months. However, the symptoms of menopause may be felt for at least ten years before periods stop. This can actually be anywhere between ages 35-55. There is no statistical data to support any actual age that it begins. It would seem to be purely an individual based process closely linked to genetics, environmental issues and whether a woman has had a complete or partial hysterectomy (known as medically induced menopause). Technically speaking a woman does not know she was in menopause until the end when she realizes she has not had a period in 12 consecutive months. By this time she is considered postmenopausal!

It is during this time that most women will experience the “symptoms” of menopause as seen below. During perimenopause and menopause, the ovaries, which produce female hormones such as estrogen and progesterone, begin to produce less and less of these hormones. The effects of this drop may bring about certain issues.

Estrogen is responsible for the development of:

- Breast tissue
- Body shape
- Body hair
- It is also said to protect bone mass

Thus the drop of estrogen may result in a decrease in breast tissue, skin elasticity and bone loss.

Contrary to popular belief there is also a loss (or shifting) of fat deposits in the female body at this time.

Progesterone balances out the hormone estrogen and once estrogen declines, progesterone levels will follow. Since progesterone has the tendency to retain fluid in the body, especially in the ligaments and other connective tissues, which enables our muscles, tendons and ligaments to remain flexible, you may find, with this decline, a decrease in the flexibility of the joints.

There may also be some joint pain as the cushioning effects of cartilage begin to lessen. Estrogen also has anti inflammatory effects that may also cause joint pain. This is sometimes mistaken for arthritis.

While estrogen and progesterone decline, please remember that we don't lose these hormones entirely. They have just declined. There may be an increase in the level of androgens, a male hormone. It is sometimes thought that this increase is responsible for middle aged spread and also the increase in facial hair. I say it is what has made me stronger physically!

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE AND CAN THEY BE INTERPRETED ANOTHER WAY?

- **HOT FLASHES - OR POWER SURGES.** This intense heat begins deep in the core of the body and radiates outwards. It has the ability to cause grown women to rapidly shed their clothes. Deep winter suits this woman best; standing naked knee deep in snow has the effect of lowering the body temperature to normal levels. Barring this drastic action, breathing through a hot flash, drinking less caffeine and alcohol (oh dear) and watching what you eat may also help.
- **SLEEP DISORDERS** such as insomnia, difficulty falling asleep, waking up frequently, or restless sleep, lead to fatigue. If you can't sleep, get up and do something productive. My feeling is that we don't need as much sleep as before and instead of fighting it, go with the flow. So much can be done in the wee hours of the morning with no interruptions. Have a nap during the day if necessary. Some will say that napping can disrupt your sleep cycle. I say when you feel tired, nap and let the rest of the day be more productive and enjoyable rather than dragging your way through it. Sometimes being overtired can disrupt your sleep as well.
- **MOOD SWINGS**, irritability, depression, anxiety, or nervousness indicate to me, unresolved issues. This is a time when a lot of women go inwards and reflect on their lives and try and decide what is best for them. Going back to school, starting a new career, and/or living alone are some of the life changing steps that have been taken by menopausal women. Take a good hard look at your life and decide whether to make the change for the better and get rid of some of these symptoms or stay in your comfort zone and suffer the consequences.
- **DECREASED LIBIDO.** My particular favourite. For the first time EVER women can enjoy sex without worrying about getting pregnant. Most menopausal women I have spoken to have seen an INCREASE in their sex lives. If you haven't, maybe you should change your partner? Just saying.
- **VAGINAL DRYNESS AND ATROPHY.** If you're not aroused, you're not aroused. Not your fault. If, however you are aroused and dry then there are some gels out there that may make your life easier. Try looking at your diet and lifestyle too.
- **MENSTRUAL CYCLE CHANGES** may include heavier periods, uterine fibroids, spotting between periods, or skipped cycles, as well as worsening PMS. Again this may be due to unresolved issues as well as poor diet and lack of exercise.
- **FUZZY THINKING, DECREASED OR IMPAIRED MEMORY AND ATTENTION.** This doesn't have to happen. Discipline and focus on the issues at hand are necessary. Life is changing, so must our way of thinking. If whatever you are doing doesn't interest you then maybe that is the cause of the attention deficit. Find something that arouses your passion. I can guarantee you won't have any fuzzy thinking then!

- **INCREASED FOOD CRAVINGS AND STUBBORN WEIGHT GAIN.** Yes we all know about emotional eating. Let's eat mindfully and with the intention of nourishing not punishing our bodies. Our choice to make it a good one. Food cravings are all about trying to nourish a need not hunger.
- **DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS** such as irritable bowel, bloating, or acid reflux are all stress related. Calming down and breathing and focusing on what we really want will go a long way in alleviating some of these problems.
- **CARDIAC COMPLAINTS**, such as heart arrhythmia, chest pain, palpitations are also stress symptoms. A session of Pilates with breathing and relaxation as a focus will help.
- **JOINT AND MUSCLE SYMPTOMS**, including inflammation, stiffness or pain. This may be an effect of a drop in estrogen levels. Take a look at your workout and try to accommodate your new body. If running hurts, look for something with less impact. It is time to take charge of your own workout and determine what is right for YOUR body NOW. Not the body you had last year or when you were in high school.
- **DIZZINESS, DECREASED BALANCE, HEADACHES OR MENSTRUAL MIGRAINES.** Balance can be maintained with functional exercises. Tension in the body may also cause headaches. Breathing and relaxing may help these symptoms.
- **BREAST TENDERNESS, BREAST CYSTS, OR NIPPLE DISCHARGE.** See you health care provider about hormone imbalance. Look at your diet and exercise routines.
- **HAIR LOSS**; unwanted facial hair growth; dry eyes, skin, or hair; midlife acne. Eating nourishing food, exercising and dealing with your issues will go a long way in helping with these ailments.
- **PELVIC OR URINARY COMPLAINTS**, including urinary incontinence. Pelvic floor work will absolutely help with this. The pelvic floor is a sensitive issue with many women whatever stage of life they are in. Education on the function of this group of muscles may go a long way in helping women understand their bodies better. It is not a given that we should suffer ANY kind of deterioration of our bodies. WE must put in the work necessary to achieve and maintain wellness during these years.

Bottom line is that YOU are able to help yourself through this period. Listen to your heart, your soul and your feelings and try and take control over your own health. You know your body the best and the right education and information will help you on this journey.

## WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF MENOPAUSE?

### THE BODY

Collagen is the main protein of connective tissue and is also responsible for skin strength and elasticity. As we age the ability to rebuild collagen is decreased. The fat layer under the skin starts to decrease and this may lead to wrinkles and sagging skin. It isn't just the skin though that is affected but also muscle tone. Exercise has been proven to have the ability to stimulate collagen regeneration in the muscles and bones. A double benefit for menopausal women with the beginnings of osteoporosis.

With the decrease of the hormone estrogen, bone density may become an issue. Weight bearing exercise has been proven to not only arrest osteoporosis but actually reverse it to some degree. Pilates is a safe and very beneficial system of movement for those who have this condition.

Estrogen has anti inflammatory properties and its decrease may allow swelling in the joints to occur. Sometimes this swelling is mistaken for arthritis. While some impact is beneficial for the bones and also for rebuilding collagen, it doesn't mean we have to beat ourselves to death running five miles every day. Some better ways to protect the joints if you want to do an aerobic activity is to swim, do step aerobics or use the jumpboard on the reformer.

Along with muscle and skin tonicity loss there may sometimes be weight gain. Usually this appears around the middle with a simultaneous loss of fat around the hips and thighs. This is a combination of

hormonal fluctuations and the slowing down of the metabolism. It can also be a sign of stress. Many women become stressed about this journey rather than trying to go with the flow. Stress fat usually shows up around the middle. This is where exercise may not only help shift the hormonal balance by keeping blood sugar on an even keel but may help a woman feel better and stronger as her physical body changes for the better. There are plenty of solutions to the hormonal party just as there are to the slowing of the metabolism. Once again strenuous exercise has been shown to combat these symptoms.

We need to look closely at the type of exercise menopausal women need. If there is a problem with weight gain, there has to be a concerted effort to reduce the number of calories consumed as well as an increase in cardio vascular activity. There is no way around this formula. No amount of abdominal work is going to actually shift the weight in this area if there is no cardio activity and decrease in caloric input. Cardio activity needs to be for at least 20-30 minutes for the body to start burning its fat storage. A fast paced Pilates Mat class is probably not going to achieve this!

While most of us are into creating a stress free environment with gentle exercises and stretching, the truth is that we need to be worked out hard. We need to get OFF our backs and moving more, using more resistance and having a whole lot more FUN. Muscular movement is known to move lymph as well which will aid in helping us feel better as we rid ourselves of toxins and excess hormones.

Pick up the pace of your mat classes. Use more springs on the reformers and Cadillacs and use more standing exercises. Invest in some type of cardio machine- bikes, ellipticals and treadmills and get on them for at least 20 minutes before class. Getting the heart rate up and sustaining it for at least 20 minutes will release the feel good hormones “endorphins” into the blood stream. It will also rev up the metabolism and keep it turned up for a while after the end of exercising.

Use a bell curve to plan your classes if you’re a teacher. Start off slow (with breathing and pre Pilates exercises) increase the level and intensity, sustain this level and then begin to cool down. This is an aerobic fitness formula but seems to work very well for the menopausal woman.

The jumpboard on the reformer is an excellent tool for this. So is jumping on a trampoline (or rebounder). It is also of a lower impact for those of you who really can’t cope with the higher impact stuff.

Use more resistance for arm work and preferably stand to do this. Arm work off the end of the Cadillac is good for this. If you have issues standing, sit on a stability ball for a challenge without the strain.

## THE MIND

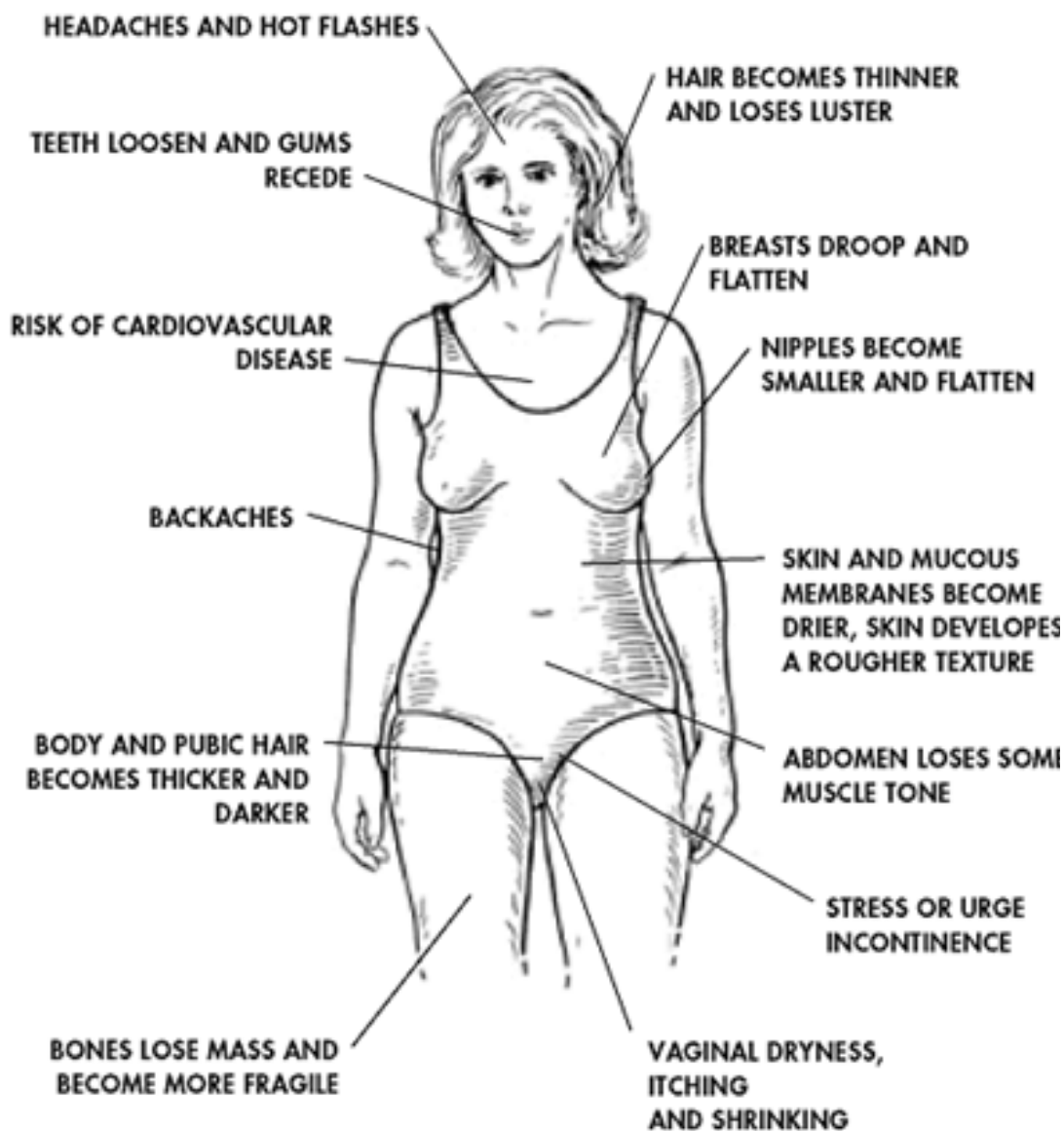
Women tend to experience mood swings, depression and irritability among several other symptoms during this time. Exercise is known to help alleviate these symptoms. However, it has to be of a certain level before the benefits of releasing endorphins is felt. Having said that, simple exercises like breathing and

stretching are also great stress blasters. Start your workout with a series of deep breaths to focus and calm the mind and end with more of the same to bring the body back into the center. Use stretches in between the exercises for rest periods as well as to stretch the muscles that are now working harder than before. This is NOT your mother’s Pilates class! Stretching increases flexibility which in turn helps with achieving balance and control over the body. Menopause can be a time of disorientation not just of the mind but of the body as well. Increasing balance exercises along with the stretches is a good idea. Trying to balance will help focus the mind. I have included some exercises that will challenge the brain as well as the body. Deep abdominal breathing not only calms and focuses the mind; it helps tone and strengthen the abdominal muscles as well. Sometimes extreme fatigue can be a problem and if so, a session of breathing and stretching along with some simple exercises may be just what the doctor ordered. It may help promote better sleep which is probably why they are fatigued in the first place. Breathing can also help you adjust to the changes that are taking place. It may help you look at this from a different perspective. Deep breathing allows you to go deeper onto your psyche where I believe, your answers lie.

## THE SPIRIT

This is a time of loss for most women. The loss of youth, vitality, the ability to bear children and the empty nest syndrome. They have to deal with a changing body, a befuddled mind and the mood swings. This is a lot to handle. Exercise will serve to make you feel better and in doing so you are better able to cope with the madness of menopause. This is also a time of self reflection, a reemergence of the self. Most of women report an opening of the mind and an insatiable desire to learn new things. At this stage of life most of us are strong and confident and are willing to do what it takes to achieve balance in our lives. Pilates seems to fit the bill for this very special time.

## A SORRY SIGHT



A sorry story indeed if we are to believe this picture. These are changes that are looked upon as horrific and irreversible. While some women may experience some of these symptoms some of the time, most women do not seem to have as many issues as the media would like to make out.

Nothing is irreversible including your physical fitness and shape.

## WHY SHOULD MENOPAUSAL WOMEN EXERCISE ANYWAY?

Exercise has been shown to alleviate some of the symptoms that are experienced during this time.

- Bone density loss may be arrested and/or reversed by exercise
- Weight gain can be controlled with exercise
- Fatigue and lethargy can be helped with exercise
- Strength and balance may be maintained through exercise.
- Mood can be lifted through the release of endorphins during exercise.



# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PILATES FOR MENOPAUSE?

If we look at the principles of Pilates, we will see how beneficial this exercise system is for women going through menopause.

## PILATES MENOPAUSE PRINCIPLES™

### **BREATHING**

Breathing reduces stress and helps calm and focus your client. Some women may experience anxiety attacks during this time and deep breathing may help with this condition. Breathing may also help with the ability to get a good night's sleep as insomnia is sometimes a problem. The pumping action of the diaphragm will also serve to pump the lymph system, clearing toxins quicker from the body and helping with the slowing down of the aging body.

### **STRENGTH**

Resistance training is essential for the menopausal client. As estrogen declines there is a corresponding decline in bone density. Resistance training may help arrest and even reverse some of these effects.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

Maintaining flexibility is important in maintaining balance

### **ENDURANCE**

Pilates develops the ability to cope and endure this phase of life. Preferably with humor.

### **COORDINATION**

Due to hormonal imbalance, some women become not just mentally uncoordinated but physically as well. Pilates provides an opportunity to focus the mind and gain control over the body.

### **TOTAL BODY INTEGRATION**

This will help maintain function, balance and control over the changing body

### **RELAXATION**

Definitely needed! Coordinated with the breath, this becomes an aid to sleeping better, focusing better and coping better.

# THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF MENOPAUSE

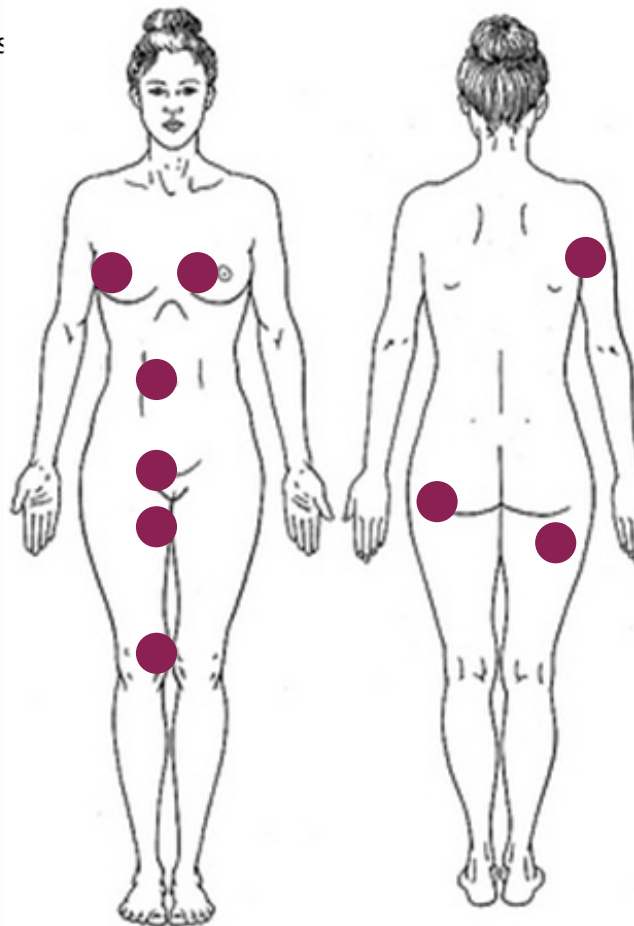
So now that you have an idea of what it is, what its effects are on the body and what we can do to help, let's look at this from an exercise point of view. Exercise will increase bone density, muscular strength and balance. All very necessary elements of a menopause exercise session.

## WHAT AREAS OF THE BODY ARE WE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?

The female body is different from the male body (yes!) and needs a different way of exercising especially at this stage of life. Female bodies have fat deposits in specific places and as we age these fat deposits start to diminish. What we're left behind with is sagging skin. What we need to do is build up the muscle. For this reason, the menopausal workout has to be not just more intense but smarter in its implementation.

This fat distribution is generally as follows:

- The breasts
- The upper arms- the triceps area.
- Around the navel
- Between the thighs
- The buttocks
- The outer thighs
- Around the vagina
- Inside of the knees



# EXERCISE CONCEPTS

Apart from the breast area-(a good supportive bra is a necessity) we can hopefully try to increase the bulk and tone of the underlying muscles. If a woman is overweight, building up the muscle without a subsequent decrease in her fat reserves will only make her look bigger. For fat reduction to take place there has to be some cardiovascular type exercise and a decrease in calories taken in.

## ARM WORK

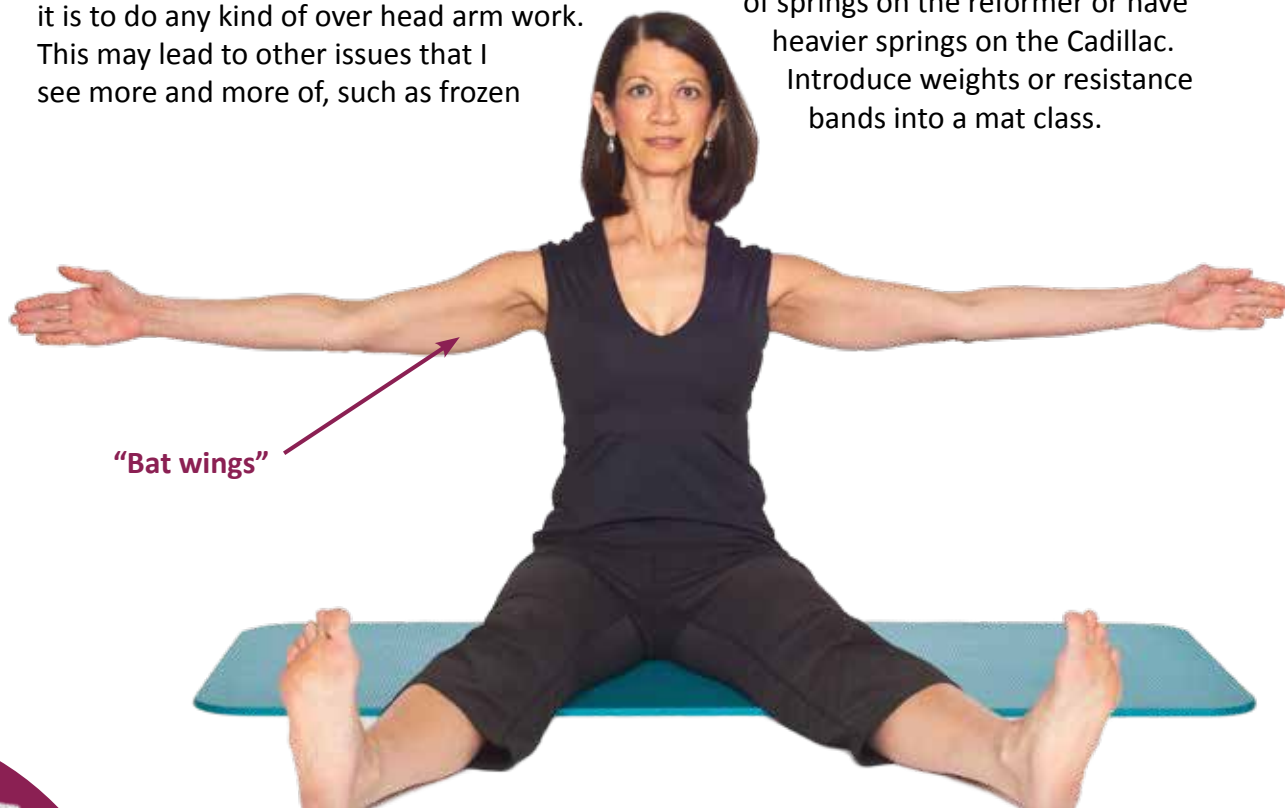
Ask any menopausal woman and she will tell you about her “bat wings” also known as the triceps. I prefer to look at these as my angel wings starting to grow back in.

Arm work is essential. Will building the muscle take away the sagging skin? No unfortunately it doesn't. (I have tried valiantly!) But you will gain strength physically and this will translate into feeling more confident about your body. I do find though that the older we get, the harder it is to do any kind of over head arm work. This may lead to other issues that I see more and more of, such as frozen

shoulder and rotator cuff issues.

In an effort to lose the sag, many women think loading up on the weights is what will do the trick. The fitness formula of light weights to tone and heavy weights to build muscle works well here. More repetitions with light weights will keep injuries to a minimum and muscles looking good. If you do add springs for arm work, watch for signs of muscle fatigue and build the resistance slowly. For muscle build up and more strength we can increase the number of springs on the reformer or have heavier springs on the Cadillac.

Introduce weights or resistance bands into a mat class.



"Bat wings"

## UPPER BODY WORK

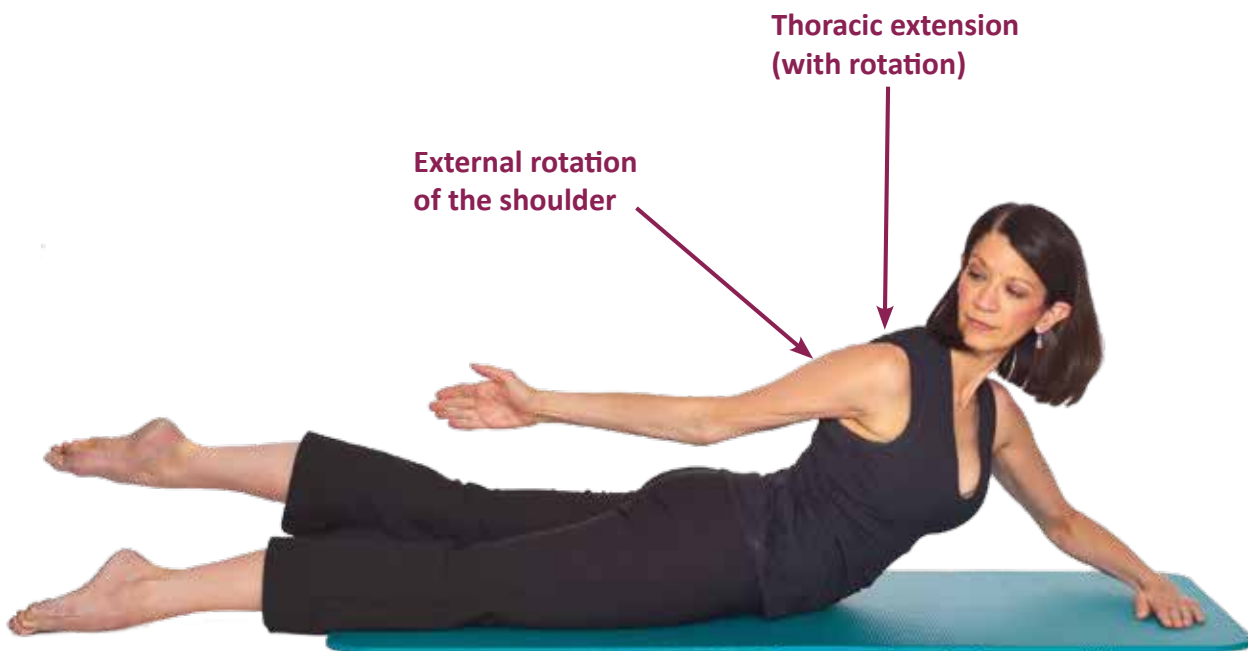
Over head arm work may also build tension rather than strength if not done properly and this in turn may create some postural challenges around the neck and shoulder area. There is a tendency towards kyphosis and sometimes the appearance of a dowagers hump during menopause, though sometimes this could be a reflection of fatigue and tension rather than weak muscles. It may also be due to incorrect placement of the shoulders when attempting to perform resistance work with the arms.

External rotation and thoracic extension are important aspects of upper body conditioning.

In doing back extension we need to include articulation as well as what I call “neutral”

lifting of the thoracic spine. The focus for arm and back work is lower below the shoulder line than up in the neck area. Pulling the shoulder blades down and getting into the latissimus dorsi and lower traps, triceps and shoulder adductors and rhomboids rather than the upper and middle trapezius works well.

Rotation of the torso is also an important aspect of conditioning in this population. The sides and back body generally become weaker as the muscles lose some tone with the aging process. Many exercise routines; Pilates included, work more from the front body. This program includes work that incorporates more internal, external obliques and the QL and Psoas muscles as these are important stabilizing muscles of the pelvic area as well as back extension work.



With this age group too come the concerns of osteoporosis and the contraindication of flexion of the torso. For this reason I have included some flexion of the torso exercises from an extension range of motion. This becomes more functional for the client as she will then use the muscles that will help her stand up straighter, rather than creating more of that forward flexion posture.

**Thoracic Extension**



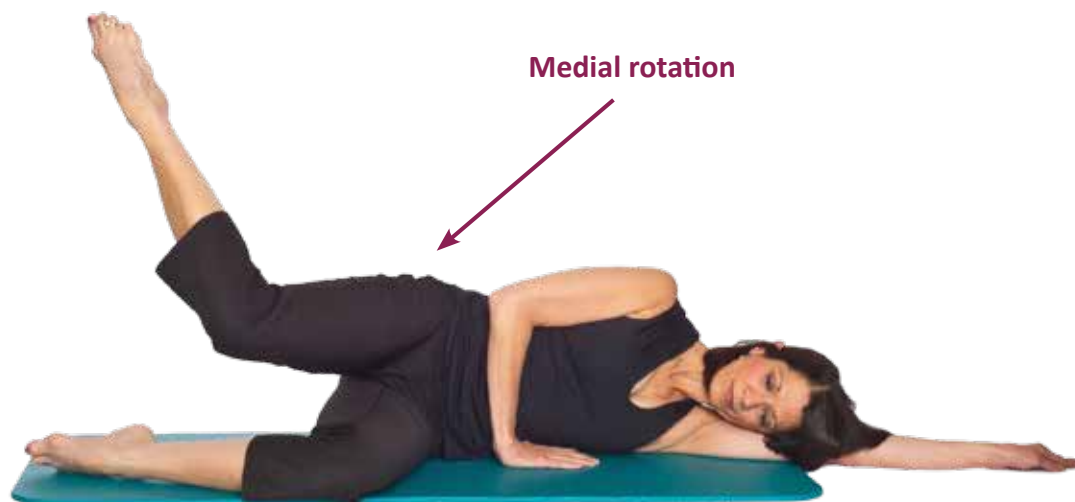
**Thoracic Flexion**



## HIP WORK

This area tends to lose strength and stability and keeping this area functional will help prevent issues with balance.

We have all done the hip adductor/abductor work but now we will take it one step further. We will increase then range of motion and include moving through all planes as well as standing exercises as much as possible.



Balance

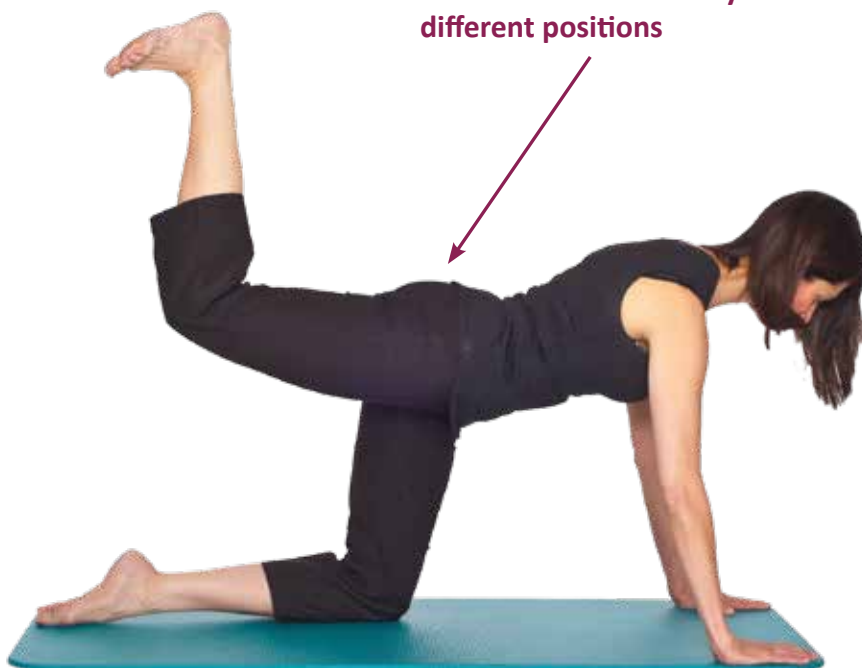


Bringing most of the exercises out of a supine position greatly improves the functioning of the body. Standing will also engage the pelvic floor much more.

## GLUT WORK

The gluteus maximus gets its shape not just from the muscle but also from the fat layer beneath it. As a woman begins to age, she loses this natural fat deposit. The skin surrounding this muscle begins to droop. The gluteus maximus does not necessarily work hard in our day to day activities. It becomes activated only when there is extra work to be done as in climbing stairs or coming out of a knee bend. So this muscle really needs some extra work during a Pilates session. This is not just an aesthetic point of view but also for balance and maintaining strength.

Glut work done in many different positions

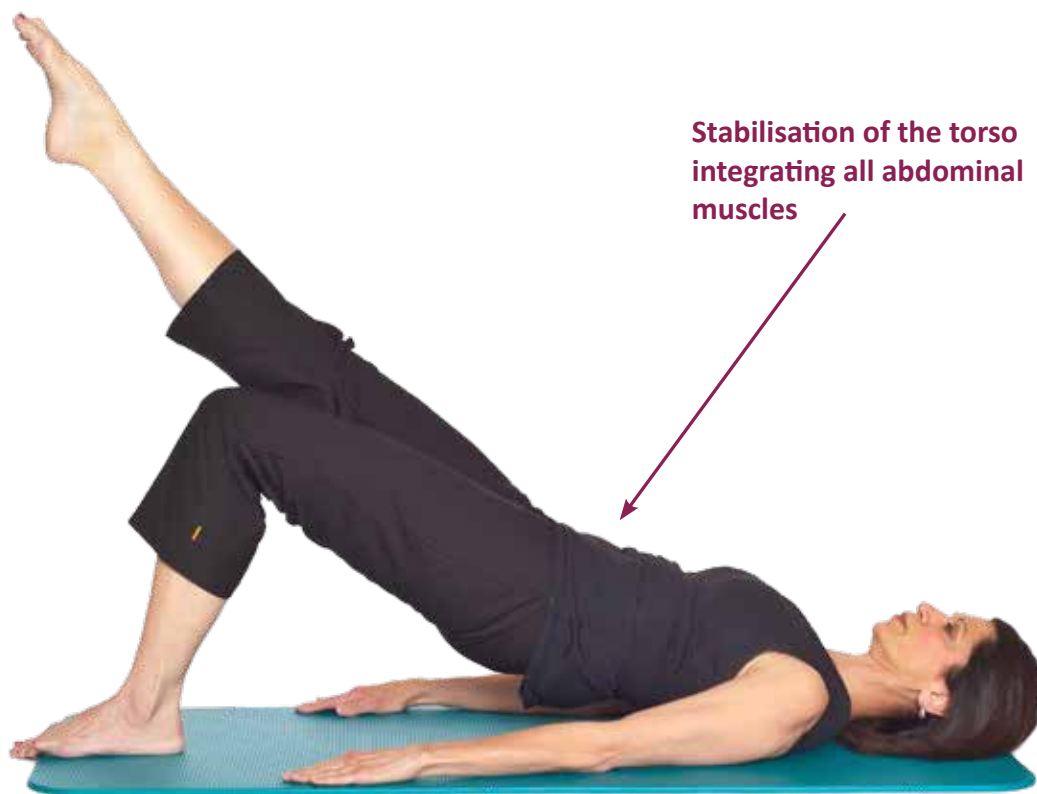


## ABDOMINALS

This area starts to lose tone and with any weight gain can begin to look unsightly. With the older woman, our concern is with osteoporosis and the contraindication of flexion of the torso. Most Pilates exercises include this and so we have to try and perform abdominal work that will activate more stabilization rather than flexion.

We have included some abdominal work that takes the range of motion from extension to neutral rather than into flexion. This also seems to have a better effect on the menopausal posture than the traditional flexion.

We have also upped the intensity for our other abdominal work.



## PELVIC FLOOR WORK

Most Pilates routines on the mat and equipment are done in a supine position. While this is a good position to be in for the most part, it does not load the pelvic floor. Standing positions or positions that take you from a sitting to kneeling or standing position are functional and load the pelvic floor.



# BREATHING & RELAXATION

Before every workout it is always a good idea to calm the body and mind in order to reap the best benefits from the exercise. Muscles cannot work optimally when they are tense. A relaxed muscle will enable you to work “deeper” and will have more capacity for strengthening.

This is one of the most important aspects of any exercise program. We can use the breath for the following:

- Creating focus.
- Creating relaxation.
- Activating the pelvic floor and abdominals.
- Establishing individual body alignment.

Learning to breathe deeply will reset the body reactors. It will change the over worked sympathetic “flight or fight” system to the parasympathetic “rest and relax” system. Breathing also acts as a “pump” for the lymph system which, on its own, does not have the ability to move waste out of the body relying on movement and breathing to help.

Deep abdominal breathing is such a great stress reducer as well as focusing the mind and calming the nerves. It is wonderful to see the energy change in a class when everyone begins to breathe deeply. It creates such a calm, serene atmosphere and is truly beneficial for those who have run into class after a hectic day.

The muscles and bones involved with breathing include the lungs, the diaphragm, the transversus abdominus, the posterior serratus and the intercostals (the muscles between the ribs). These muscles have attachments to the ribcage which protects the heart and lungs.

During inhalation the diaphragm contracts and pulls downward. This is mirrored by the pelvic floor diaphragm and the palate diaphragm in the roof of the mouth. It is this mirroring that allows us to stretch and release the pelvic floor muscles on an inhale.

The (breathing) diaphragm relaxes back to its original position on an exhalation. There is a moment between an inhale and exhale where no movement of the diaphragm takes place. This is a rest space. This is the space where relaxation occurs.

The pelvic diaphragm (floor) will also return to normal. If we are to strengthen the pelvic floor, the connection should be made at the end of the exhale when all muscles are back to their resting position. This will create a gentler pull on the PF muscles rather than an aggressive, sometimes violent contraction which does little to work the muscles according to their function.

The ribcage will expand sideways and forward on the inhale and return to normal on the exhalation unless there is a forced exhalation, in which case, the lower ribs will be pulled together, engaging the transversus abdominus and posterior serratus muscles. This is a wonderful way to activate the transversus abdominus.

## SUPINE BREATHING EXERCISE SEQUENCE

### Benefits

*The supine position eliminates the need to activate the surrounding muscles.  
Activates the pelvic floor muscles.*



- Lie supine with the knees bent, feet hip width apart and place the finger tips on the sit bones.
- Inhale into the finger tips using verbal cuing to indicate the breath flowing through the pelvic floor. “Breathe in between your sit bones”
- Exhale and initiate the out breath by visualizing the sit bones coming together. “Exhale and gently bring the sit bones together”
- Repeat desired number of times



### Then add

- Place the finger tips on the hip bones.
- Inhale in between the hip bones.”Breathe in between the hip bones”
- Exhale and visualize the hip bones narrowing. “Exhale and gently bring the hip bones together”
- Repeat desired number of times.

### Then add

- Place the hands on the lower ribcage
- Inhale into the hands, expanding the ribcage, “Inhale between the hands”
- Exhale and pull the lower ribcage together. “Exhale and gently bring the ribcage together”
- Repeat desired number of times



### Then add

- Place the hands on the posterior ribcage.
- Inhale into the hands
- Exhale and allow the ribcage to relax towards the mat OR exhale and gently bring the front of the ribcage together, keeping the back wide.
- Repeat desired number of times



### Then put it all together

- Place the hands on the abdominals.
- Inhale into the abdominals.
- Exhale and allow the abdominals to relax towards the spine.
- At the end of the exhale, gently pull the abdominals towards the spine to create the “flatness” of the abdominals.
- Then connect the sit bones, hip bones and ribcage,
- The cue becomes, “inhale, exhale, drop, connect and (do a movement)”
- Repeat desired number of times

## ALIGNING THE BODY THROUGH RELAXATION

We achieve a relaxed state of alignment through breathing and releasing techniques at the beginning of every session.

Relaxing the muscles loosens their hold on the bones and this may allow the bones to realign according to the individual body. There is no “perfect” alignment; every “body” is different.

### Cuing alignment

After using the breath to create relaxation in the body begin using these cues for alignment.

- In a supine position, as the body begins to relax, begin to “feel” the back of the head on the mat. This will position the head correctly.
- Then breathe and loosen the neck. The release of tension may adjust the alignment of the neck.
- Working down the body, “feel” both shoulder blades on the mat.
- Keep breathing and releasing in between to ensure the body is releasing.
- Work your way down the body- release the back of the ribcage towards the mat. Don’t force alignment.
- “Feel” the back of the pelvis on the mat and then “feel” the soles of the feet on the mat.

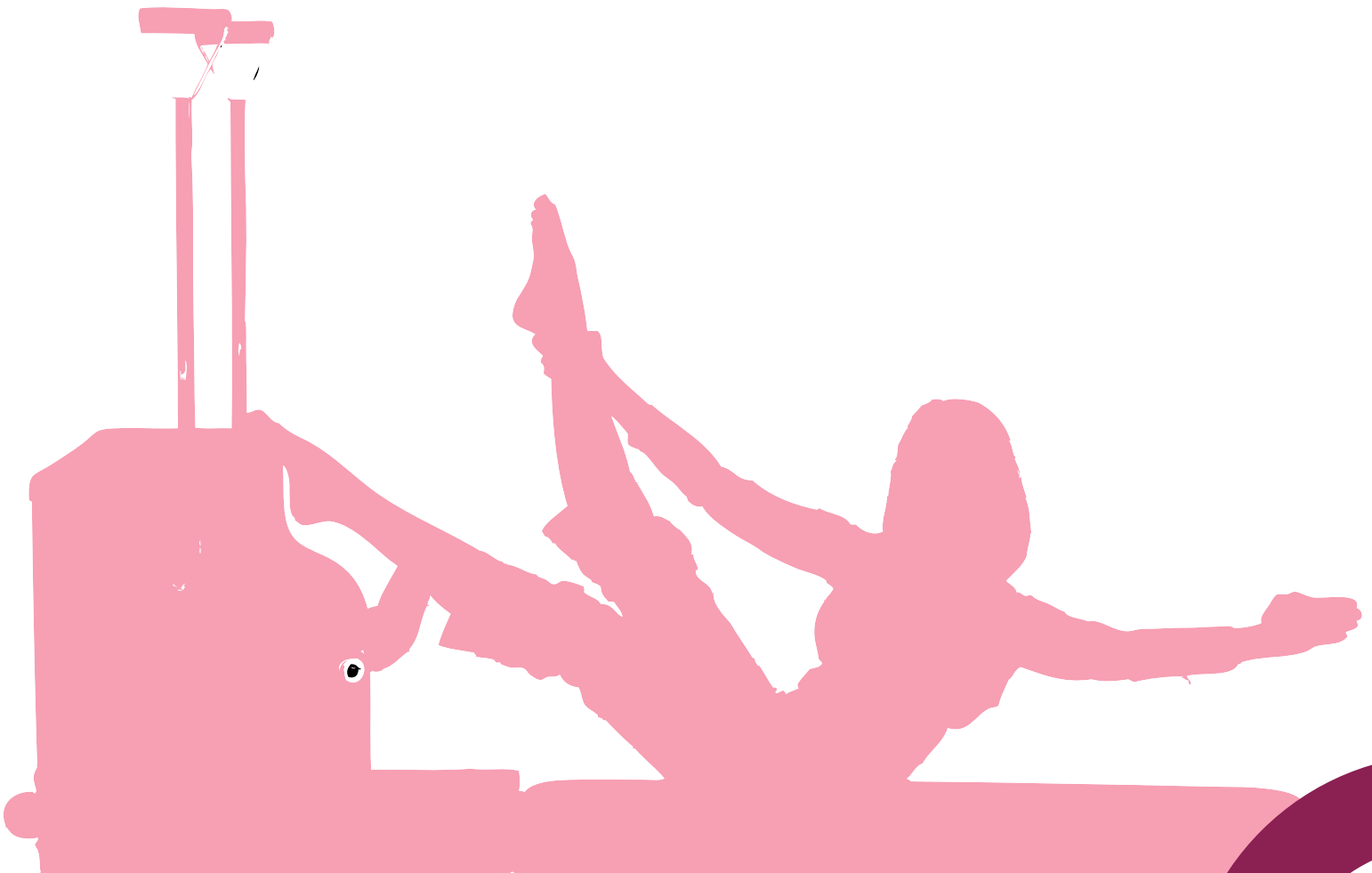
Allow time to relax into this alignment.

Nine times out of ten, you will find that you have perfectly good alignment. From this point, the session should maintain a sense of relaxation to ensure that the muscles are not working with tension. This will help keep the body in a good alignment.

# CHAIR WORKOUT

The chair remains one of the most under used pieces of equipment in most Pilates studios. There are so many wonderful exercises that can be done on the chair. I have included a few here that I almost always teach to my clients. Of course, this is not the entire chair repertoire but a selected few that I like to use.

I always begin my sessions with the breathing sequence and relaxation alignment.



# Supine exercises facing the chair

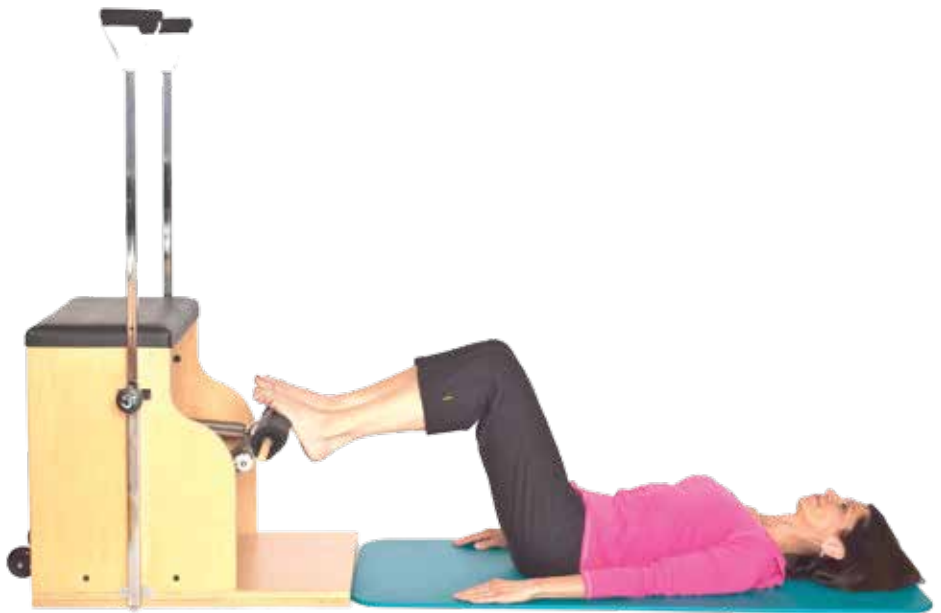
## BRIDGING WITH HAMSTRING CURLS

### Benefits

*Strengthens and tones the Gluts and the hamstrings.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium to high*

- Lie supine on the mat in front of the chair. Place the arms by your sides.
- Place both feet on the pedal in parallel.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and roll up the spine into a bridge position. Use the cues, tailbone to pubic bone, pubic bone to chest to activate the pelvic floor first.
- Inhale to hold.



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- Exhale and press the pedal down. Keep the pelvis lifted.
- Inhale to release.
- Exhale to repeat.
- Repeat in lateral and medial rotation. Both these positions will work the pelvic floor muscles.



## BRIDGING AND WALKING

### Benefits

*Strengthens and tones the Gluts and the hamstrings.*

### *Split pedal*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*

- Lie supine on the mat in front of the chair. Arms by your side.
- Place both feet on the pedal in parallel.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and roll up the spine into a bridge position. Use the cues, tailbone to pubic bone, pubic bone to chest to activate the pelvic floor first.
- Inhale to hold.
- Exhale and press one pedal down.
- Inhale to release.
- Exhale to press the other pedal down.
- Repeat several times.
- Repeat in lateral and medial rotation to work the pelvic floor muscles.





## ROLLUP WITH LEGS ON THE TOP OF THE CHAIR

### Benefits

*Strengthens and tones the abdominals.  
Stretches the hamstrings.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*



- Lie supine with both feet on the edge of the top of the chair.
- Arms are extended overhead.
- Inhale to bring both arms over the chest.
- Exhale and roll up the spine into a teaser position extending the spine
- Inhale at the top.
- Exhale and roll back down articulating through the spine.



## ROLLUP INTO SINGLE LEG PULL

### Benefits

*Strengthens the psoas muscle.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*

- Lie supine with both feet on the edge of the top of the chair.
- Arms are extended overhead.
- Inhale to bring both arms over the chest.
- Exhale and as you roll up the spine, lift one leg off the top of the chair.
- Inhale to lower the leg back down.
- Exhale and roll back down articulating the spine
- Repeat with the other leg off the chair.





## ROLL UP INTO ROTATION WITH SINGLE LEG PULL

### Benefits

*Strengthens the obliques.*

*Strengthens the psoas.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*



- Lie supine with both feet on the edge of the top of the chair.
- Arms are extended overhead.
- Inhale to bring both arms over the chest.
- Exhale and roll up the spine into a teaser position rotating the torso to one side on the way up.
- Inhale to return to center.
- Exhale and roll down back down articulating through the spine.
- Repeat on the other side.



## ROCKS

### Benefits

*Strengthens the lower transversus abdominus.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*

- Lie supine with both feet on the edge of the top of the chair.
- Arms are extended overhead.
- Inhale to bring both arms over the chest.
- Exhale and roll up the spine into a teaser position rotating the torso to one side on the way up. From this position, hold onto the ankle (or wherever comfortable).
- Inhale.
- Exhale and rock the pelvis backwards.

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- Inhale to rock forward.
- Exhale and rock the pelvis backwards.
- Inhale to return to center.
- Exhale and roll down back down articulating through the spine.

# Supine exercises facing away from the chair

## SUPINE ARMS

### Benefits

*Strengthens the arms without adding strain to the neck muscles.*

*Establishes good shoulder placement.*

*Springs – 2 light high*

- Lie supine on a mat facing away from the chair.
- Place the feet on the mat with knees bent.
- Reach overhead and hold the dowel with both hands.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and pull the pedal down activating from the Latissimus dorsi and serratus anterior.
- Inhale to release.

### VARIATION

- Change the arm positions to target different muscles.



## LEG LOWERS AND LIFTS

### Benefits

*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.  
Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*

*Springs- 2 light medium*

- *Lie supine on the mat facing away from the chair.*
- *Pull the pedal down to stabilize the shoulders.*
- *Lift the legs to 90.*
- *Inhale to lower the legs away from the body.*
- *Exhale to bring them back towards the body.*



## ROLLOVER

### Benefits

*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.*

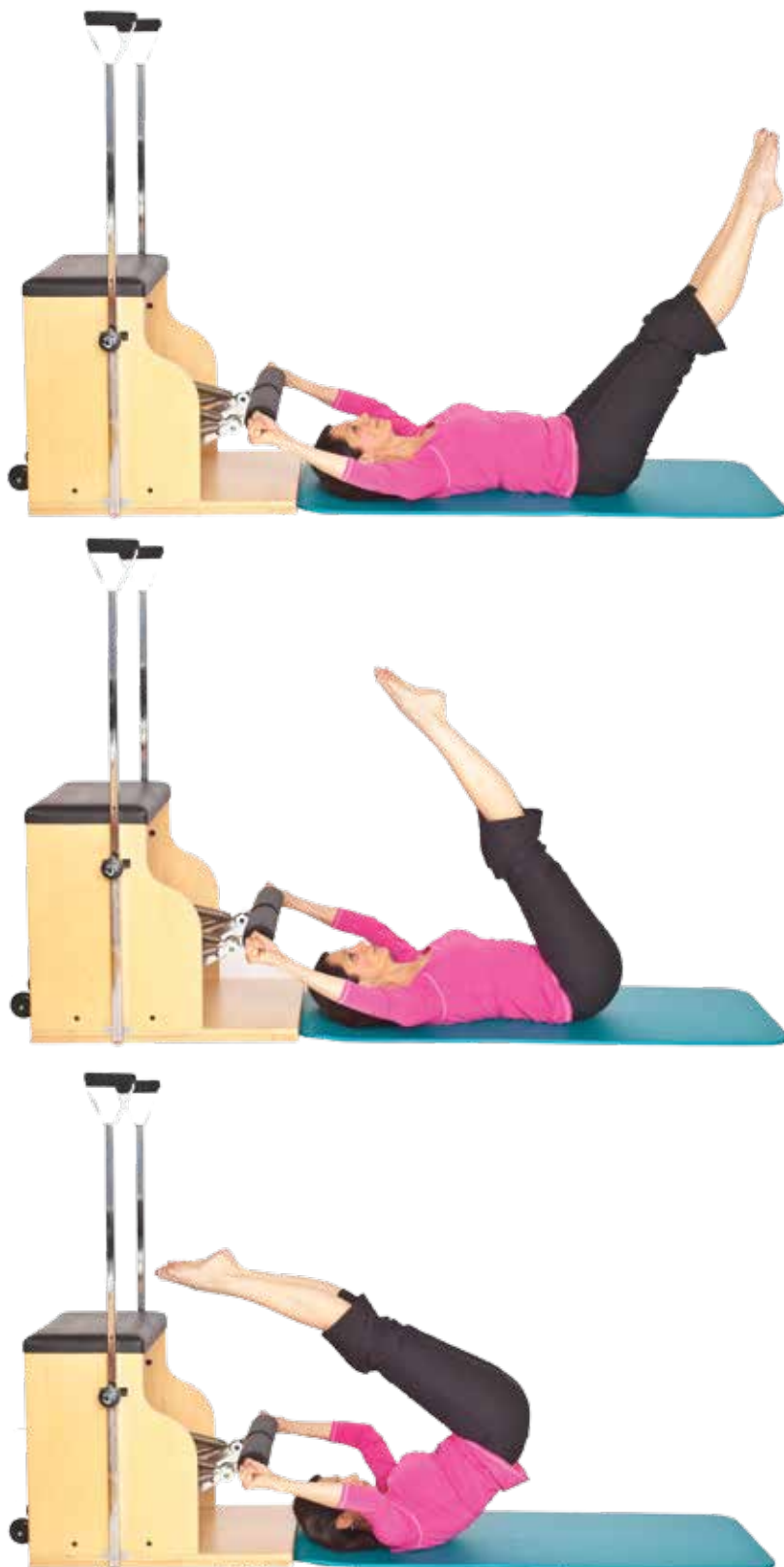
*Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*

*Increases spinal articulation and abdominal strength.*

*Springs - 2 light medium*

- Lie supine on the mat facing away from the chair.
- Pull the pedal down to stabilize the shoulders.
- Lift the legs to 90.
- Inhale to lower the legs away from the body.
- Exhale to bring them back towards the body.
- Continue to lift the legs over the head into a rollover.

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- Inhale at the top.
- Exhale and roll back down the spine.
- Inhale to lower the legs.



## ROLLOVER INTO JACKKNIFE

### Benefits

*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.*

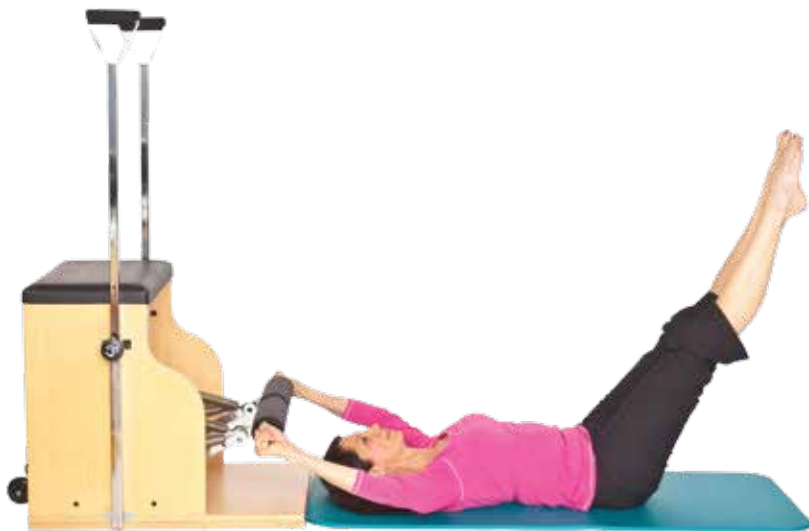
*Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*

*Increases spinal articulation and abdominal strength.*

*Springs - 2 light medium*

- Lie supine on the mat facing away from the chair.
- Pull the pedal down to stabilize the shoulders.
- Lift the legs to 90.
- Inhale to lower the legs away from the body
- Exhale to bring them back towards the body.
- Continue to exhale and extend the hips into the jackknife position.
- Inhale at the top.
- Exhale and roll back down the spine.





## CONTROL BALANCE

### Benefits

*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.*

*Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*

*Teaches control and balance.*

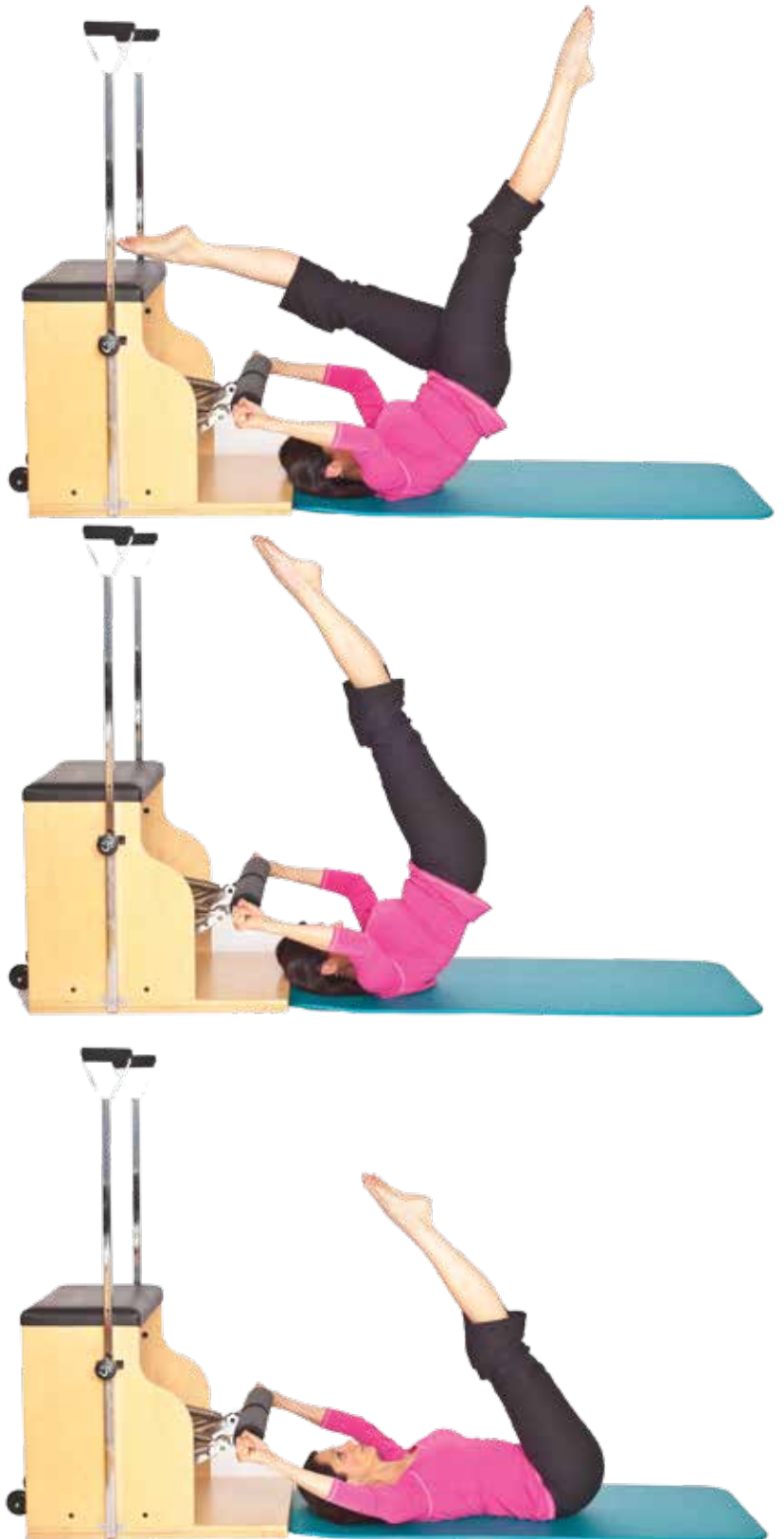
*Springs - 2 light medium*

- Lie supine on the mat facing away from the chair.
- Pull the pedal down to stabilize the shoulders.
- Lift the legs to 90.
- Inhale to lower the legs away from the body
- Exhale to bring them back towards the body.
- Exhale, roll up and extend the hips into the jackknife position

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- Inhale to lower one leg towards the top of the chair, extending the other leg away.
- Exhale to return.
- Inhale to change legs.
- Exhale to roll back down the spine.



## Sitting exercises facing the chair

### LAT PRESS DOWNS ON PEDAL

#### Benefits

*Strengthens the latissimus dorsi  
serratus anterior and lower trapezius.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Either place both feet up on the edge of the front of the chair or sit cross legged in front.
- Place both hands on the wooden dowel.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down activating the lower trapezius, serratus anterior and latissimus dorsi.
- Inhale to release.



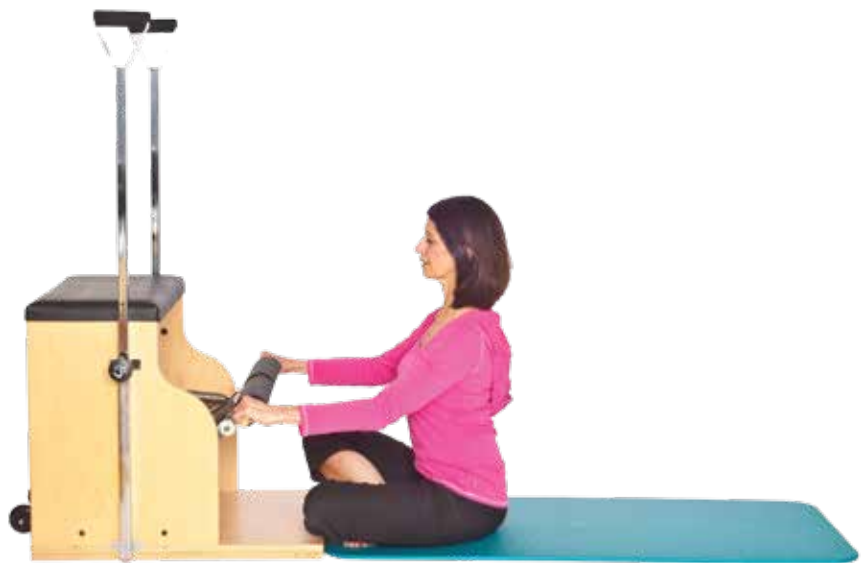
## TORSO EXTENSION FROM THE FLOOR

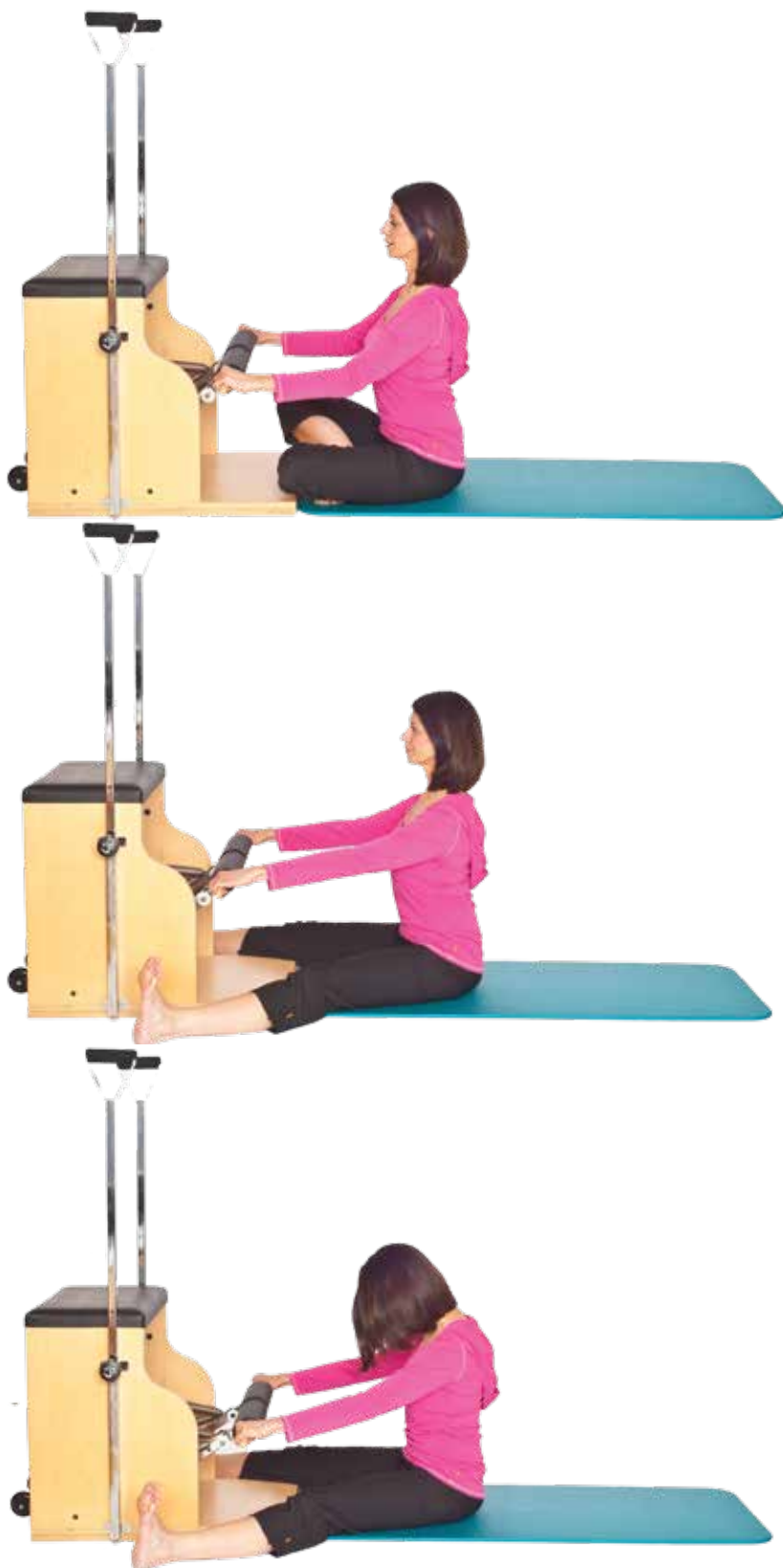
### Benefits

*Strengthens the latissimus dorsi.  
serratus anterior and lower trapezius.  
Increases spinal extension.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Sit cross leg in front of the chair.
- Place both hands on the wooden dowel.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down and extend the thoracic spine lifting the sternum.
- Inhale to release back to neutral.





## TORSO FLEXION FROM THE FLOOR

### Benefits

*Strengthens the latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior and lower trapezius.  
Increases spinal flexion.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Sit cross leg or in a straddle position in front of the chair.
- Place both hands on the wooden dowel.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down and flex the thoracic spine.
- Inhale to release.

# Lower body

## SQUATS FROM THE TOP

### Benefits

*Strengthens the gluts and hamstrings.*

*Springs - Heavy - 2 heavy low, 2 light middle*

- Stand facing the chair.
- Place both hands on the handles.
- Stand on the pedal with both feet.
- Place one foot on the top of the chair.
- Press up until the pedal is high and the top knee is parallel to the floor.
- Inhale and bend the back knee
- Exhale and straighten the back knee.
- Repeat with the other leg.





## SQUATS FROM THE PEDAL - FROG FRONT

### Benefits

*Strengthens the gluts and hamstrings.  
Stabilises the shoulder girdle.  
Strengthens the external hip rotators.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Face the chair.
- Place both hands on the back of the top of the chair.
- Place both feet on the pedal in lateral rotation with the heels together. Keep spine in neutral.
- Inhale and allow the pedal to rise.
- Exhale and press the pedal down keeping the pelvis on the same level.



## PIKE

### Benefits

*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.  
Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*

*Springs - 2 light high*

- Stand on the pedal and place both hands on the back of the chair
- Flex the torso and rise up onto the balls of the feet.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and increase the flexion of the spine as you pull the abdominals into the spine and lift the pedal.
- Inhale to lower the pedal keeping the spine as round as possible.
- Exhale to lift the pedal.





## FROG FROM THE FRONT

### Benefits

*Strengthens the gluts.*  
*Strengthens the abdominal muscles.*  
*Stabilises the shoulder girdle.*  
*Strengthens the external hip rotators.*

*Springs - medium to heavy*

- Sit on the top of the chair.
- Place both hands at the back top.
- Place both feet in lateral rotation on the pedal
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pelvis forward until it is off the chair.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down keeping the pelvis still.
- Inhale to release.



# Standing Exercises

## LEG WORK FACING THE CHAIR

### Benefits

*Aids in balance.*

*Springs – 2 heavy medium*

- Stand facing the chair in parallel with one foot on the pedal.
- Arms are extended out to the side.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down.
- Inhale to release.
- Repeat in lateral rotation.
- Repeat in medial rotation.





## SIDEWAYS CROSSED LEG

### Benefits

*Aids in balance.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*

- Stand sideways to and slightly behind the chair.
- Place the outside leg on the pedal in lateral rotation.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down.
- Inhale to release.



## SIDEWAYS SAME LEG

### Benefits

*Aids in balance.*

*Springs - 2 heavy medium*

- Stand sideways to and slightly behind the chair.
- Place the inside leg on the pedal in lateral rotation.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down.
- Inhale to release.



## LATERAL FLEXION FROM THE TOP

### Benefits

*Strengthens the obliques.*

*Springs - 2 light middle*

- *Lie sideways on the chair with both legs extended.*
- *Hold onto the handle in front if necessary.*
- *Place the other hand on the pedal.*
- *Inhale.*
- *Exhale and press the pedal down.*
- *Inhale into back into lateral flexion.*
- *Exhale to press the pedal down.*



## LATERAL FLEXION WITH LEG LIFTS

### Benefits

*Strengthens the obliques.*

*Strengthens the hip abductors.*

*Springs - 2 light middle*

- Lie sideways on the chair with both legs extended.
- Hold onto the handle in front if necessary.
- Place the other hand on the pedal.
- Inhale.
- Exhale and press the pedal down.
- Inhale into lateral flexion, at the same time lift the top leg.
- Exhale to press the pedal down.



# Prone exercises

## BACK EXTENSION WITH ARTICULATION

### Benefits

*Allows the cervical and thoracic spine to “drop” into a more natural curve.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Lie prone over the top of the chair with both hands on the pedal.
- Inhale to begin articulating through the spine into back extension starting with the cervical spine.
- Exhale and begin to articulate back down the spine starting from the thoracolumbar junction all the way to the top of the cervical spine. The chin may lift slightly.
- Inhale to repeat.



## RIBCAGE LIFTS

### Benefits

*Realigns the thoracic curve.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Lie prone over the top of the chair with both hands on the pedal.
- Inhale to lengthen the spine.
- Exhale and draw the bottom of the ribcage together and lift the thoracic spine in one piece. The cue is to press the spine back in between the shoulder blades.
- Inhale to lower.





## THORACIC WAVE

### Benefits

*Loosens a tight thoracic spine.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Lie prone over the top of the chair with both hands on the pedal.
- Inhale to articulate into back extension.
- Exhale and flex the torso and press the pedal down holding the flexion.

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- Inhale and begin to extend the torso allowing the pedal to lift you back into extension.
- Repeat by pushing the pedal down with thoracic flexion.





### ADD ON

- Inhale to articulate into back extension.
- Press the pedal down with the spine in extension.
- Flex the spine and allow the pedal to lift the torso articulating into thoracic extension again.
- Press the pedal down with the spine in extension and repeat.



## BACK EXTENSION WITH ROTATION AND OPPOSITE LEG LIFT

### Benefits

*Strengthens the external rotators cuff muscles.*

*Strengthens the internal obliques.*

*Strengthens the back extensors.*

*Springs - 2 heavy low*

- Lie prone over the top of the chair and place one hand on the pedal and the other hand on the opposite butt cheek.
- Exhale, externally rotate the free arm, articulate into back extension, rotating the torso towards the opposite heel while lifting the opposite leg.
- Inhale to rotate back to center and internally rotate the shoulder and lower the leg.



## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## NOTES

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Carolyn Anthony



Carolyn Anthony has been in the Dance, Fitness and Pilates world for over 30 years. She trained as a professional dancer in London, England in the late 1970's. She obtained her teaching diploma in 1982 and went on to dance professionally in Europe, Asia and Africa. She remains a member of the Royal Academy of Dancing and an Associate of The Imperial Society of Teacher of Dance. Carolyn was introduced to Pilates in 1983, at the prompting of her Jazz instructor. She found Alan Herdman and continued to learn from him until she left for the USA. It wasn't until 2001 that she realized there were certification programs for Pilates and she promptly signed up for them. She has studied Polestar, PhysicalMind, CoreGrace and Basi techniques. On her to do list is to certify with the PMA. Carolyn is now on the faculty of Balanced Body University.

In the 80's as a newcomer to the USA her focus turned to fitness as the aerobics boom began to hit. Carolyn certified with AFAA and the AEA as a group fitness instructor and went on to study the PACE (people with arthritis can exercise) program. She put all this knowledge to good use as an instructor with the New England Health and Racquet Clubs.

While living in Connecticut, Carolyn also joined the faculty of the Hartford Conservatory of Music and Dance, teaching ballet, jazz and pedagogy to the diploma students. She danced with the New England Dance Theater and helped found and became the Artistic Director of the Enfield Civic Ballet Company. It was during this time that she became pregnant with her first child.

Carolyn was dismayed to learn that no matter how many certifications or diplomas she had acquired, nothing had given her any information on how to exercise during her pregnancy. Being too scared to do what she was doing, Carolyn opted to stop moving during the pregnancy. Finding herself with an unrecognizable body after the birth of her daughter, she busied herself with designing an exercise program that was both safe and beneficial for pregnant women. Her goal was to prepare the body for the birth, not just to be fit. Through the course of her next two pregnancies, Carolyn refined her skills and knowledge and today you have the highly successful Pre and Post natal Pilates Specialist programs.

Carolyn works from a holistic point of view, seeing the body as an amazing instrument that needs the correct attention in order to work properly. Her efforts to make this possible for her clients has led her to study for her Masters in Natural Health, become certified as a Birth Doula and to learn other healing modalities. Currently Carolyn is a level two Reiki practitioner, Level 1 Myofascial release practitioner (John Barnes approach) and an Esoteric Healer. Her love of dance is evident in the way she instructs her movement classes whether Pilates or fitness.

Today The Center for Women's Fitness has 12 host studios around the world, 10 faculty members and more than 300 certified teachers teaching the method. The Center continues to expand.

## Credits

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Graphic Design, Anthony Kapp



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