

# Pilates

## ON THE MAT

### TIPS:

- Focus on breathing. Fully inhale, and on the point of most resistance, fully exhale like you are wringing out a sponge.
- Compete with yourself, no one else.
- Be precise. Focus on the smooth and coordinated flow of the exercise and then segue to the next one.
- Check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Core training with no equipment needed by Carol Ann Weber

At first glance, all of the straps, springs, and sliders that make up the reformer devices found in most Pilates studios might look a bit like medieval torture. In reality, it's actually one of the pieces of exercise equipment developed by Joseph Pilates in the 1920s. Reformers were designed to create a low-impact workout that increases core strength, stability, balance, and coordination while also improving posture. They're so effective that athletes, dancers, and fitness enthusiasts have found Pilates to be an excellent choice for achieving their goals. In fact, current research indicates that Pilates reduces chronic low back pain, improves the cardiorespiratory system, enhances sleep, and elevates self-perception of personal health and well-being.

In his book, *Return to Life Through Contrology*, Pilates describes his teachings as “the art of controlled movements” with an emphasis on expanding lung capacity and core strength. He calls the core the body’s powerhouse and breathing is bodily house cleaning. Precision is at the heart of each exercise, with a focus on one perfect movement, not the number of reps.

### THE PILATES EFFECT

Although research on Pilates and true weight loss is mixed, it elongates and tones muscles, reduces your waistline, improves posture, and enhances the way you move. You may appear to have lost weight and look better in your clothes.

### EXPLORE THE CORE AT HOME

The good news is that you don't necessarily need a reformer. You can get many of the same benefits from mat Pilates. In fact, working without equipment demands higher levels of coordination and control from within that you don't get when relying on external assistance. So roll out the mat and let's get started.

**1. THE HUNDRED:** Lie on your back with straight arms by your hips, and straight legs together. Lift your head and shoulders off the mat and extend legs at a 45 degree angle with your arms outside of your legs. Pump your arms up and down as you inhale for 5 counts, then exhale for 5 counts. Complete 10 reps.

### 2. SINGLE LEG CIRCLES:

Lie on your back with palms flat on

the mat, legs straight. Flex one foot on the mat and raise the other leg straight up towards the ceiling with your thigh turned out and toes pointed. Circle your raised leg for 5 reps and 5 reps in reverse. Repeat with the other leg.

**3. SWAN:** Lie face down with your straight legs together and extended. Place your hands, palms down, under your shoulders with your elbows bent and close to your sides. Lift your head a few inches off the mat as you slowly lift your chest. Return to the starting position. Press your hands back on the mat, lifting your upper body higher. Again, raise your hands off the mat as you lower back down, placing your hands back on the mat as you return to starting position. Complete 6 reps. ■



**Carol Ann Weber's** 500+ articles have been published in magazines such as *Fitness Rx*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Oxygen*, and *Men's Fitness*. She has also been named the Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness “Best Columnist of the Year.” Along with weight training, she enjoys yoga and a brisk walk anywhere outdoors.