

**Pilates is not just for women. Although Pilates was developed by a strong, physically developed athletic man over 80 years ago with mostly male devotees, current statistics show that Pilates practitioners are mostly women. However, the face of Pilate's followers is slowly changing as more and more men seek the benefits of the work.**

When Body Precision opened eleven years ago, our client base was approximately 2% men. Today, that number has increased to 20%. Hugh Kenworthy came to Body Precision four years ago with chronic low back pain. He initially wanted to reduce his back pain and gain flexibility to enhance his sports performance. "I now have increased range of motion with my swing which has allowed me to get greater distance with my golf shots" states Hugh who plays to a two handicap.

### NOT JUST FOR WOMEN

Joseph Pilates based his methodology on the premise that strengthening the core muscles of the abdomen and low back will help bring the spine into greater alignment. The effect of developing this powerhouse will allow the rest of the body to achieve better balance leading to greater flexibility and range of movement. Pilates believed that development of the minor, smaller muscles helps to strengthen the larger muscles creating a well-oiled machine. This means, less pain, less injuries and greater movement with ease and power. Because the male anatomy is dominated by large, tight muscles, the benefits of Pilates could have a greater impact on men than women.

"During adolescence, boys tend to have growth spurts where the long bones of the body (femur, tibia, etc.) grow at a very quick rate, sometimes six or more inches in less than one year. The muscles that attach to these bones do not elongate at the same rate causing flexibility to be drastically reduced. The typical male often never recovers from his pre-adolescent flexibility," states Lori Sweeney, Director of Sports Medicine at Saint Joseph's University.

Traditionally, men play sports at a young age with no heed to the development of their core muscles. Strength is empha-

# PILATES and Men

By Beth Downey

sized more than flexibility and little attention is spent on balancing the two. Over time, some men continue to play sports as "weekend warriors" and either don't make time to stretch or if they do, the motion is haphazard or rushed. "In my work as Head Athletic Trainer, I see a large number of injuries directly related to poor flexibility and muscle imbalance. Males tend to work on arms and shoulders doing what I call 'curls for the girls'. They concentrate only on the rectus abdominis or six pack abdominals without understanding the connection between the powerhouse and the rest of the body," says Sweeney.

The focus on the "six-pack " or rectus abdominus does not strengthen the muscles that support the spine or core abdominals. This superficial muscle lies vertically across the front of the body. It helps you to sit-up or flex forward. The deepest abdominal muscle is the transverse abdominus (TA). This horizontal deep muscle is the target in much of the Pilates work. The TA encircles the entire torso creating a girdle of strength to support movement in the trunk, legs and arms. When the TA is weak, as what often happens when only the "six pack" is developed, instability can lead to back pain and hip, knee, and shoulder problems. Says Hugh, "Before Pilates, I would have low back pain after one round of golf. Now I can walk 36 holes of tournament golf on consecutive days and not aggravate my back."

### NO PAIN, BIG GAINS

Because Pilates is often described as a gentle exercise where sweating is not a requirement, many men are more likely to head to the nearest gym instead of a Pilates studio with spring-based equipment. However, don't be fooled by the term gentle. Men who "get" Pilates will feel worked-out yet energized at the same time. As an individual advances in Pilates, the exercises become more difficult and the pace of movement increases. The body awareness men gain from doing Pilates exercises is much different than what they learn in a gym. Pilates teaches men how to work from their powerhouse -- stabilizing the center of their body and working outward through their limbs. The focused movements require fewer repetitions and give deeper lasting results. Done correctly, Pilates can be the toughest workout a man or woman will ever have. Eric Godshalk, a Body Precision regular, has become a Pilate's devotee and says, "As a complement to weight and cardio training, Pilates has added greatly, not only to my overall flexibility, but also my awareness of being balanced in all activities. The variety of ways each muscle group is challenged makes Pilates so much more interesting to me, and I leave each session both energized and significantly more relaxed."



## PRO PILATES

Men who may feel shy about venturing into a Pilates studio may be impressed to know that several male professional athletes swear by Pilates. According to USA Today, golfers Tiger Woods, Rocco Mediate and Rich Beam are all Pilates endorsers. Tiger claims Pilates helped improve his swing while Rich Beam says it helped him win the PGA Championship. Curt Schilling, former Phillies pitcher, incorporated Pilates into his off-season training program. New Jersey Nets point guard, Jason Kidd, found Pilates gave him an edge, making him quicker and more explosive while Buffalo Bills offensive guard Ruben Brown practices Pilates to prevent him from injuries. During 2002, I had the opportunity to teach Pilates to Flyers center, Keith Primeau, who was interested in using Pilates as part of his training regiment. Pilates helped open his hips and strengthen his powerhouse. The Flyers organization went on to add Pilates based equipment at their training center in New Jersey. The benefits to athletes include more efficient movement, better endurance, increased speed and quickness. The combination of strong lean muscles with greater flexibility helps prevent injuries which in turn lengthens their professional career.

## REAL MEN DO PILATES

Interested in expanding your fitness repertoire? Remember, Joe Pilates was an athlete dedicated to achieving the greatest strength and performance of an individual body's ability. He believed that you are only as young as your spine. Although he was a cigar smoking, beer drinking German, his body remained in excellent condition into his seventy's and serves as a testament to his life's work. Real men know there's more to fitness than just working with weights. Real men want the benefits of Pilates.

## ATTENTION WOMEN!

### WANT YOUR MAN TO TRY PILATES?

- Find a good equipment-based studio in your area. Men tend to respond better to working out on equipment and will get direct feedback from the spring resistance.
- Make sure the Pilates Instructors have been certified at a comprehensive training program of 600 hours or more. They will have a better understanding of male needs and their body issues.
- Look at the studio to see if the environment suits the masculine ego. If the setting feels too "spa-like", your guy may not feel comfortable continuing his practice.
- Buy a session or two as a gift certificate so he can try Pilates. If you think he will like the mat or floor exercises, find a good instructor at a local studio, gym or YMCA. Take the class with him to help him feel comfortable. Pilates is a great opportunity to do partner workouts.



*Beth Downey is the owner of Body Precision Pilates Studio in Rosemont, PA and the director of the nationally recognized Body Precision Teacher Certification Program for Traditional Pilates. Beth has been teaching Pilates for over 10 years and specializes in working with clients with back and neck issues. Body Precision is an educational member of the Pilates Method Alliance. You can reach Beth at [BethDowney@phillyfitmagazine.com](mailto:BethDowney@phillyfitmagazine.com)*