

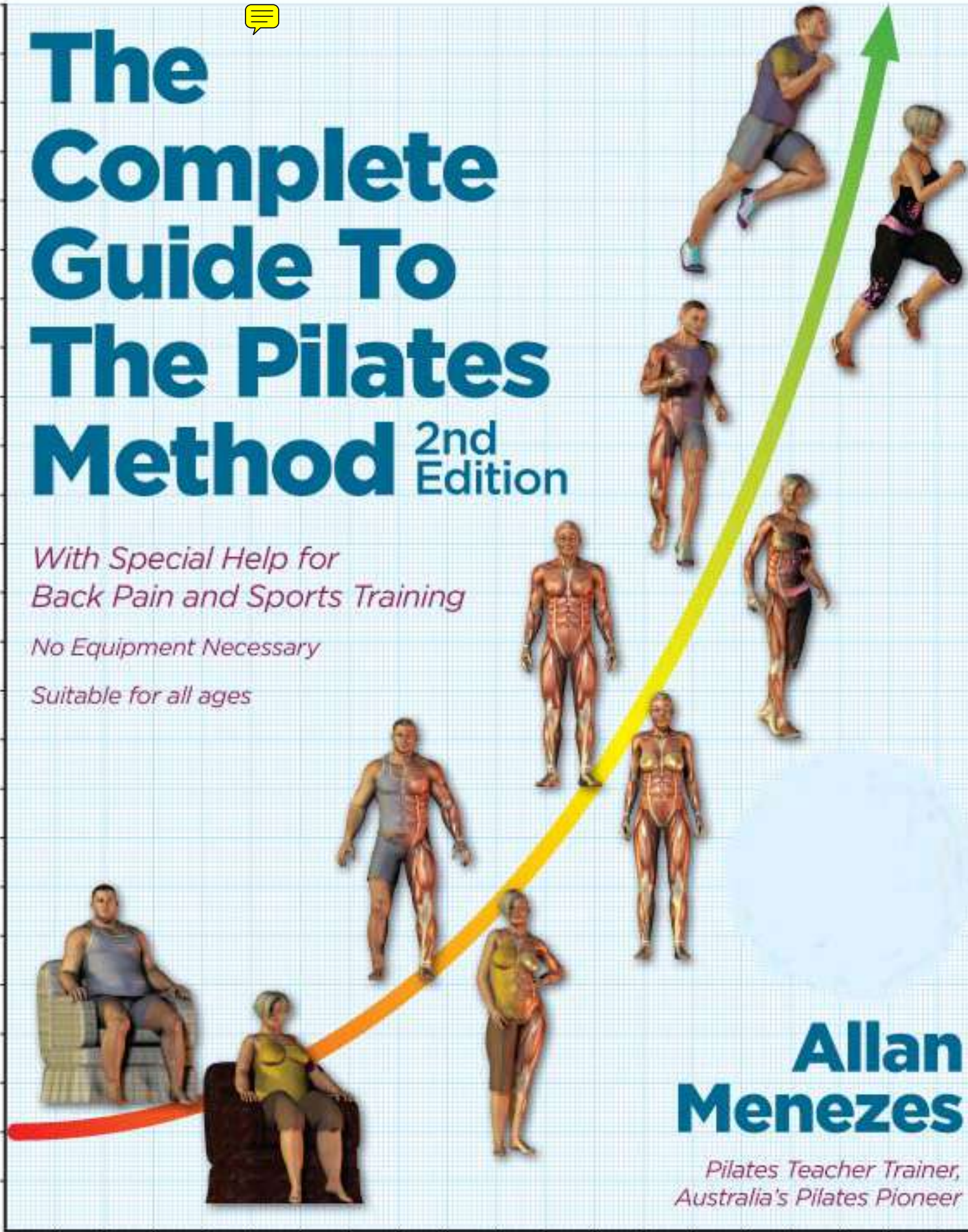


The Complete Guide To The Pilates Method 2nd Edition

With Special Help for Back Pain and Sports Training

No Equipment Necessary

Suitable for all ages



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*Pilates Teacher Trainer,
Australia's Pilates Pioneer*

STRENGTH, FLEXIBILITY, ENDURANCE, RESHAPING

TIME, APPLICATION, PERSISTENCE

This is the B-Line. *Maintain it for the rest of your life!* (We will use the term *B-Line* throughout the book, but women can think of this as the “Bikini line” and men can think of this as the “Belt line.”) Initially, you may feel some mild discomfort in the lower back. This will diminish as your body becomes used to its new position. You may notice that you are standing a little more upright. Your breathing may still feel restricted. Be sure to breathe as described in the section below on breathing.

The B-Line in Action

Stand up out of your chair. You may notice that your upper body first leaned forward over your knees, before you came to the standing position. Take a seat again, and now engage your B-Line before you rise up out of the chair. You may have noticed that you stood up without leaning forward so far, and your back may have felt more supported.

The B-Line Core and Pelvic Floor

The B-Line Core is a new concept in Pilates and also in physical therapy and other forms of movement. The idea behind the B-Line Core is to provide even more support for the core abdominal muscles, especially when the body is moving outside of the range of linear movements. Engaging the B-Line Core strengthens the abdominals from the back and sides. Up until now all abdominal work has been described as working from the front to the back.

How to Find Your B-Line Core and Pelvic Floor

THE B-LINE CORE

Standing upright, imagine replacing the area between your ribs and hips with a very large apple. Remove the core from the apple and throw it away. You are now left with a hollow cylinder in the middle of the apple (which is roughly in front of your spine). Now, starting from the muscles in the back, squeeze the hollow cylinder from all sides until it disappears. You should feel the lower-back muscles (lumbar multifidus) and the side muscles (obliques) drawing in tightly, and then the front abdominal

section—this is the B-Line Core. Now engage the B-Line (lower abs) strongly and you will feel the pelvic floor start to engage. The pelvic floor is the bottom of this hollow cylinder and the diaphragm is the top.

THE PELVIC FLOOR

Once you have engaged your B-Line Core, imagine placing the apple in an elevator and closing the doors. Now take the elevator to the second floor and hold it there for ten seconds. Then take it to the third floor and hold it there for another ten seconds. Next take it to the fourth floor and hold it there for twenty seconds. You will notice that you are, in effect, “lifting” the muscles of the pelvic floor. Practice doing this daily to keep the pelvic floor muscles working. Always make sure to squeeze the Core before the B-Line.

Another way to engage the B-Line Core is by placing the fingers on the sides of the body just above the hip bones (not touching them) with the thumbs placed on the back muscles. Now draw in away from your thumbs first and then in from the fingers on your sides. Now squeeze the bottom of the Core up to your rib cage. Doing so should strongly engage the pelvic floor while also supporting the Core stabilization muscles.

Men should understand that they, too, have a pelvic floor. By engaging these muscles on a regular basis, both men and women can minimize problems such as incontinence. Doing so will also tremendously help women to reengage these important muscles after childbirth, in order to help prevent a prolapse of the uterus.

3. BREATHING

To breathe correctly you must completely exhale and inhale, always trying very hard to “squeeze” every atom of impure air from your lungs in much the same manner that you would wring every drop of water from a wet cloth.

— J. PILATES



Breathing is the most important physical principle to refine before attempting an exercise or movement. Breathing has three major functions:

1. To carry nutrients to all parts of the body, thereby charging the whole body with more energy.
2. To carry away wastes for elimination from the body.
3. To increase stamina.



Figure 18.
Restricted breathing

Wastes can produce restrictions within the body's system. These can be various, such as tightness and restricted movement in joints, tiredness, headaches, and pain. This is not to say that breathing on its own can cure these conditions—it cannot. But, combined with the other principles, it can certainly lead to greater well-being. Drinking the required quantity of water (eight glasses per day) to assist in waste elimination also helps greatly in achieving this goal. It has

also been suggested that adequate water consumption can improve flexibility of the muscles.

As we have all seen at the gym, people often hold their breath at the most crucial part of an exercise, when releasing it could be most beneficial. You have probably been guilty of this yourself without realizing it. When we do this, we put our bodies under an enormous amount of physical tension, especially in the upper thoracic and cervical areas (neck and shoulders).

When we hold the breath while exercising, we create a situation similar to that of pressure building inside a pressure cooker. As a result, we waste energy and exert unnecessary effort. The outcome is a less-than-efficient use of the working muscles.

Try this simple exercise. Breathe in to raise your arms above your head. Hold your breath as you

lower your arms back down to your sides and simultaneously imagine squeezing oranges in your armpits. Can you feel the tension in your neck and shoulders? Now repeat the same exercise, but as you lower your arms gradually release the breath in a long sigh. Can you feel how much more relaxing this is?

You will notice that throughout the text I have used the phrase “breathe in *to* raise your arms” (or raise your leg, or make any other movement), rather than “breathe in *as you* raise your arms” (or make whatever movement). This seemingly small modification has a significant effect on core (abdominal) control and its engagement in preparation for the exercise. As a simple exercise to follow the one above, imagine you have a weight in your hand, and breathe in *as you* raise your arm. Now repeat the movement, but breathe in *to* raise your arm. Can you feel the difference in establishing core muscle connection? When you breathe in *to* raise your arms, you experience almost a bracing feeling during the movement.

Breathing properly offers other benefits as well. Consider the fact that there are two ways to improve your stamina:

- Cardiovascular workouts (such as running or bike riding).
- Changing your breathing technique.

Correct breathing for the style of Pilates described in this book, Aussie Pilates, should be performed with the following in mind:

1. Keep the neck and shoulders relaxed; hunching causes neck tension.
2. Allow the breath to flow: don't hold your breath at any point.
3. Breathe in through the nose (into the chest) for a slow count of five, without allowing the shoulders to lift. (Try this in front of a mirror, keeping an eye on your shoulders.)



SURPRISING BENEFITS FOR OPERA SINGERS

Opera singers often feel uncomfortable about strengthening or tightening their stomach muscles. This is because they use the diaphragm to control their voice projection. But opera singers who have followed Pilates have felt that their singing actually improved because their abdominal control and lung capacity had increased.

Over several months, as their stomach muscles strengthened, their ability to focus their breathing into their upper back and armpits improved. With better abdominal strength and control and increased lung capacity, they were able to hold notes for longer periods and also to use their abdominals for improved voice projection.

4. Without stopping, breathe out of the mouth with a loud sigh for a slow count of five. Drop the jaw wide and do not purse the lips into any shape. (Breathing out through the teeth or through a tight jaw increases the tension in the neck, jaw, and face.) We call this the “ocean breath out.” It sounds like an ocean wave hitting the beach, loud at first and then slowly tapering off at the end. This sound tells you (and the instructor, if applicable) that you are breathing correctly. Once you have gotten used to this kind of breathing, you are able to focus on the important elements of the exercises you’re doing.
5. If you find it difficult to breathe while holding in your B-Line Core, breathe into your upper back (shoulder blades) and armpits. Imagine inflating balloons in these areas (see Figure 19). In the exercise descriptions we will mention breathing into the armpits; remember that this also implies breathing into the upper back.

After some practice you may find that your breathing capacity has increased by 20 percent or more, simply by changing your breathing technique and without having to run around the block several times! Try this method of breathing, along with engaging the B-Line Core, in the following exercise.

Breathing Exercises

Sit down on the floor with your legs comfortably crossed in front of you. Sit as upright as possible, as if your lower back were being supported by a wall, with no gaps between your tailbone and the wall. Do not lean into the wall. Place your hands snugly just below your navel. Without hunching the shoulders, take a five-count breath in through the nose, and then ocean breathe out of the mouth. You may notice that on the breath in you felt the stomach move outward, and on the breath out it went down.

Now repeat the same exercise, except before you breathe in, press your hands very firmly on the B-Line below the navel, pressing against your lower abdominals and toward your spine, and keep them there. Now breathe into your chest. You will find that this is quite difficult to achieve without the hands moving at all. You may also find that the breath into the chest is quite restricted and that there is a slight sensation of “choking” the breath into your chest.



Figure 19.
Breathing
“into the back”

This happens when we become less active because our breathing capacity reduces as the muscles between our ribs, the intercostals, tighten. If we return to our usual level of exercise after a long break, we find that before long we are gasping for breath. As we do less abdominal work, we tend to breathe more into the stomach and thus loosen the abdominal muscles. This is why we feel a choking, restricted sensation when breathing in while holding our abdominals tight.



Endurance, or stamina, is the body's ability to perform better over a greater length of time with less stress and fatigue. By controlling your breathing and expanding your lung capacity, you can achieve greater stamina. Many people think that only aerobic activity can increase stamina. However, deeper, controlled breathing, combined with even "low-grade," or nonaerobic, physical activity, is also capable of increasing stamina. As you achieve a certain level of fitness, increase the repetitions without resting. Over a period of time, performing more repetitions, even with ease, will increase muscle endurance and tone. After several weeks of following the principles of breathing and abdominal control outlined here, people have reported increased stamina when doing what was once a strenuous half-hour walk.

If you practice controlled, slow, deep breathing while exercising, you will become accustomed to breathing in this way, so that it will become the norm even when you are at rest. This is less stressful on the body as a whole and can also lower your resting heart rate, which can be a determining factor in your longevity.

Here is a simple technique for overcoming the previously mentioned tightness in the chest. Kneel on the floor with your bottom on your heels. Now lower your chest to your thighs and rest your forehead on the floor (or on cushions if that is more comfortable). Wrap your arms around your torso, placing your hands as high up on your back, on the ribs, as you can without creating any tension in the neck or shoulder area. In this position it would be fairly difficult to take a deep breath into the chest or abdominals, as they are pressed against your thighs. Now breathe into your hands. This has the same effect as breathing into the upper back. Avoid breathing into the chest or abdominals. Practice breathing this way for ten breaths in and out.

General Breathing Rules

I have created several breathing rules to follow when performing any exercise, whether Pilates or otherwise. (Some exceptions exist to the rules, which I will point out as they occur.) The purposes of the rules are:

- To protect the back;
- To increase stamina;
- To reduce the strain from overexertion.

Here are the rules:

1. When lying on the back (supine), with the arms or the legs moving from a vertical position *away from* the center of the body, ocean breathe out. When the arms or the legs move vertically *toward* the center, breathe in. At all times, maintain the B-Line Core. (When the arms move overhead, also "flatten" the rib cage to support the thoracic [middle] spine; this will reduce any overlifting of the lower back.)
2. When the arms or legs move laterally (out to the sides) away from the median (the midline of the body), breathe in. For example, when performing "flies" (lying on the back with the arms to the ceiling and opening the arms outward), breathe in. Ocean breathe out as they come back to the center.
3. When lying in the side position or on the stomach (prone), if any part of the body is lifted against gravity, squeeze the B-Line Core, and ocean breathe out. Breathe in when lowering to the floor. (However, see the "important exception," below.)
Important exception: When lying prone and lifting the torso, breathe in! This greatly reduces the stress and pressure on the lower back.
4. When on all fours (hands and feet/knees), when drawing the limbs away from the center or median, breathe in. When closing toward the center, keep the navel firmly to the spine and ocean breathe out. For example, see Leg Pull Prone (Exercise 54).
5. When contracting (curling forward) or rotating the torso, ocean breathe out.



Exercise

Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, and your hands placed by your sides, palms upward. Extend one leg into the air, and slowly lower this leg away from you, breathing out. (For those with stronger abdominals, try this exercise with both legs in the air.) If you attempt to breathe in while performing this movement you will feel the back arching.



Figure 20. Breathe in on the leg lift.

The same can be done with the arms in the air, stretching them toward the floor above the head. As you lower the arms away from your center, you may notice one of two things. You actually want to breathe in, but doing so will cause the upper back to arch as the ribs lift to the ceiling. Now ocean breathe out to repeat the same movement, making sure to maintain the B-Line Core and flattening the rib cage to the floor. You will feel greater core control and better stability in the upper back.

4. CONTROL

Ideally, our muscles should obey our will. Reasonably, our will should not be dominated by the reflex actions of our muscles.

— J. PILATES

Once the first three principles have been practiced and mastered as well as possible, the next principle, control, can be more easily applied. Control is essential in preventing injuries. Main-

taining control of every movement takes concentration, effort, and awareness of what the rest of the body is doing at the same time. Control also involves integrating the previous three principles.

Whether the movements involve simply lengthening the neck and maintaining that position in order to reduce cervical lordosis (an arch in the neck), or whether it is a larger movement, such as a *grande ronde de jambe* in classical dance, the degree of control required may be the same. When someone initially practices these movements, it takes effort and concentration to perfect them to the best of the person's ability. Repetition, dedication, and application improve the degree of control and the perfection of the movement.

Uncontrolled, "automatic" movements, such as performing rapid lat pull-downs (pulling a weight downward and behind the head, with arms out to the sides, to work the latissimus dorsi muscles) can lead to injury if incorrect muscles are used and incorrect posture is enforced. The action becomes mindless. Without concentration and control, the body's stronger muscles will tend to do all the work (and stay stronger), and the weaker, usually flabby muscles will tend to remain relatively unused and therefore weak.

It is gaining control over weaker parts of the body that improves their strength and performance.

SUE P.

Sue P., a sprinter who attended our Body Control Pilates studios, used to come out of the starting blocks with a "stammering" start—very small steps—until she got into her proper stride. She felt she was losing a fraction of a second as a result, and therefore winning fewer races. When she did the initial work to correct an imbalance in the pelvic area, her times improved. With more specific pelvic-stabilization work, she gained better control and strength in the pelvic area and no longer stammered out of the blocks.



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