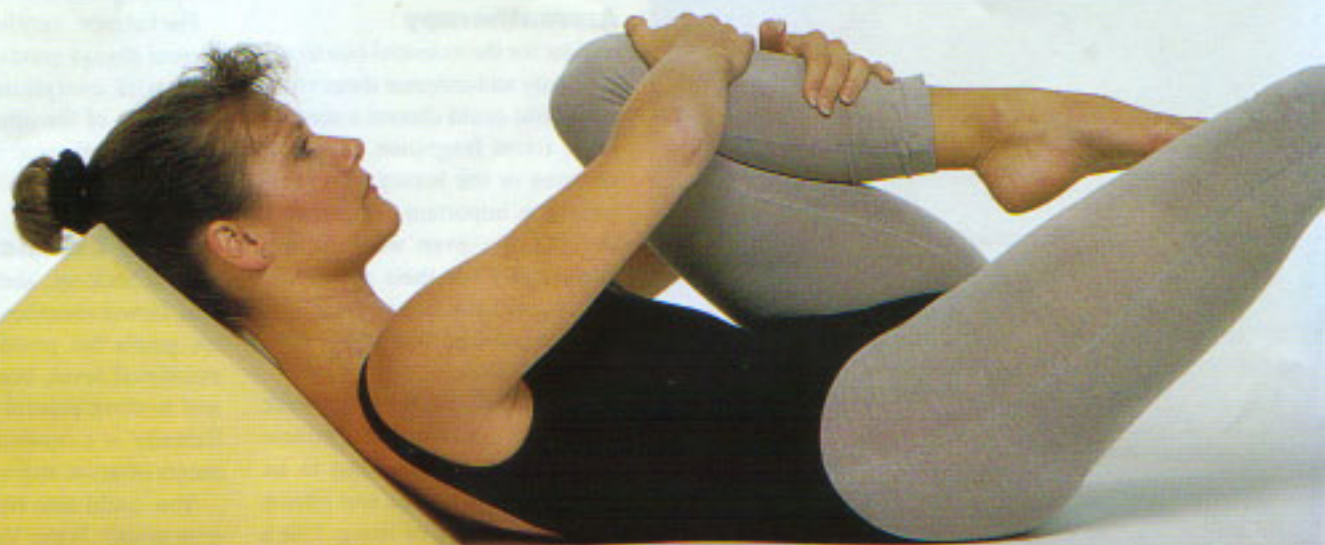


PILATES

By Allan Menezes



My first experience of The Pilates Method was in 1982, when I was looking for a cure to a nagging back injury which had plagued me for two years following a debilitating rugby injury.

The studio I entered was in a poky room in the basement of a London dance studio. Dancers were strapped to various pieces of equipment performing seemingly impossible movements, with arms and legs in an assortment of positions. I wondered whether I had come to the right place!

However, after an hour and a half of personal attention and moving my stiff body much as a yoga beginner would, (using the equipment to assist, resist and control the various positions) I felt a stretching sensation in my lower back that I had not felt in years!

The attention and encouragement from the instructors was even further able to boost my expectations of what I was capable of achieving. At the end of the session I was convinced that this 'new' system was the answer to my physical problems.

What is Pilates and where did it come from?

The Pilates Method was first developed by a German, Josef Pilates, in the 1920s in the United States. Joe himself was a frail child who grew up plagued by various illnesses such as rickets, rheumatic fever and asthma. Like many other pioneers in the physical therapies, these 'drawbacks' made him more determined to become fit and healthy. He followed a strong regime consisting of a combination of yoga and body building techniques and by the time he was 14 he had gained sufficient strength to become an accomplished gymnast, boxer and skier.

This combination of eastern and western techniques of his mind and body approach to physical development created an unusual 'concoction' of movements which are now the basic concepts of all Pilates followers. Exercises such as the elephant, the swan or the double leg stretch may sound unusual. They are even more so on the dramatic effect they have on the body's strength and flexibility.

While in England during the World War I, Joe Pilates was interned as an 'enemy alien' on the Isle of Man where he taught other prisoners his methods based on core

principles such as breath control, a strong centre and isolation of the muscle being worked. His unusual method of physical conditioning was so successful that none of his fellow inmates contracted a ravaging 'flu that swept England at the time.

After the War, Pilates returned to Germany and made the decision to emigrate to America when he realised that his ideals did not follow those of the New German Army, where he was physical trainer. On the ship over he met a nurse, Clara, whom he later married. With their combined love and deep interest of the physical wellbeing of individuals, they opened a studio in New York.

Pilates has always been renowned as a tool for rehabilitation

From the early days of working with Jerome Robbins and Martha Graham's injured dancers, Pilates has expanded to include sporting personalities and athletes from all arenas such as basketball players, rugby league professionals, tennis players, golfers and swimmers. While sidelined with an injury, Pilates is the perfect method as a rehabilitation tool to isolate the injured