

# Body Control

Most important of all, however, you have a greater awareness of how your body moves, of where its 'centre' is. The Method focuses on strengthening that centre — the abdominal muscles — which, in turn, strengthens everything else. After you have mastered the basic exercises, new variations and extra exercises are added to the routine.

When Joe Pilates developed what became the Pilates Method more than 60 years ago, he was already accomplished in the fields of body-building, skiing, gymnastics, boxing and self-defence.

Pilates developed his Method in Germany and England before the First World War. During the 1920s, parts of the Method were incorporated into the teachings of Rudolph von Laban, who developed Labanotation, the most widely used form of dance notation.

Joe Pilates moved to New York in the 1930s, where he opened the Pilates Studio with his wife, Clara. By the 1950s, the Method had gained a following among the greatest figures in the development of dance in America — from George Balanchine, the artistic director of the New York City Ballet, to Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Jerome Robbins, Ted Shawn, and Ruth St. Denis, known as 'the first lady of American dance'.

As Joe Pilates expanded the Method, he invented mechanical apparatus to provide even greater stretching and control. These machines — the main one being a trolley-bed pulled by springs — give Pilates studios around the world their distinctive appearance.

In Sydney, the Method already has been taken up enthusiastically by members of the Australian Ballet, the Sydney Dance Company, the One Extra Company, the cast of *Cats*, and other professional dancers and students. But dancers account for no more than 50 per cent of studio regulars. The others include people from a variety of occupations. Some of them have problems with their backs or legs. Others are there to improve their sports performance or simply to enhance their general sense of wellbeing.

Richard Gibson, a 23-year-old tax adviser has been attending the studio two or three times a week since it opened in November 1986. A former A-grade rugby player in Brisbane, Gibson was 'looking for something to build up strength without building up size'.

'It's better than aerobics,' he says. 'It does not put as much strain on your body, yet it produces strength and flexibility. It helps you breathe better and hold yourself better because a lot of the strength comes from your stomach.'



Lael Evans, 24, a member of the Sydney Dance Company, says: 'You get your centre back together, but the Method does more than strengthen muscles. It's helping me with the feeling of elongation, of total stretch without arching your back.'

A stronger centre leads to a stronger spine. Bruce Cameron, a 30-year-old professional, started working out at the Body Control Studio in January 1987. 'I've always had trouble with my lower back because I'm tall and slender and had minor accidents as a child,' he says. 'I used to wake up every morning with an ache in my back. That's virtually gone now.'

A runner since schooldays, Cameron found he had strong legs but poor flexibility. When he started the Method, he says, he was 'absolutely hopeless — I could hardly get my legs up in the air. They were shaking. But I'm getting stronger and more flexible — slowly!'

Jessica Cayley, an 18-year-old student, also came to the Body Control Studios because of problems with her back. In April 1985, she had a Harrington rod spinal fusion to correct a 70 degree scoliosis (curvature of the spine). The Pilates Method, she says, has 'decreased pain by releasing tension in the spine, increased my flexibility, and really improved my posture'.

Cayley, who started working out at the studio in November 1986, is a real inspiration to watch as she moves through her routine. She looks just like anyone else. You wouldn't know she had a rod in her spine if you weren't told.

Scott Black, 28, a member of the One Extra Dance Company, started the Method in January 1987. He had a lower back injury and concentrated on stretching and strengthening his back.



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