

## **Is Pilates Exercise Effective for Low-Back Pain?**

As the Pilates method has grown in popularity, there has been a lot of buzz about its beneficial effects on low-back pain. Many studies during the past 15 years have tried to document and quantify the value (or lack of value) of Pilates exercises on low-back health.

For those not familiar with the Pilates method, here's a very brief history: Joseph Pilates developed a system of physical training during the mid-20th century that initially was adopted primarily by dancers but became increasingly part of fitness programming at many facilities in the 1990s and continues to this day. Originally called *Contrology*, Pilates' system involves a large number of exercises designed to promote concentration, control, centering, fluidity, precision, and proper breathing. Mat Pilates classes are common in most fitness facilities; core stability, balance, muscle endurance, posture, and flexibility are emphasized. Pilates studios and some fitness entities offer Pilates exercises on special apparatus, including the Reformer, Cadillac, Barrel, and Chair. Because of the focus on the core, many assume that Pilates exercises will reduce low-back pain.

In a systematic review of systematic reviews, Wells et al. found inconclusive results regarding the effect of the Pilates method on low-back pain. Unfortunately, the results of this comprehensive analysis were inconclusive, meaning that some of the reviewed studies showed that Pilates exercises were beneficial for low-back pain sufferers, and others showed that Pilates exercises made no difference in the subject's back pain or, in some cases, actually made the pain worse. These contradictory findings may be due to several causes, including several different exercise protocols used by different instructors such as the frequency and duration of sessions per week, progression through the different exercises, etc.

In summary, the Pilates method holds the potential to help those with low-back pain, but evidence-based studies about its effectiveness show varying results. A primary factor in whether or not Pilates exercises are helpful for back pain is the ability of the instructor to provide safe and appropriate exercise variations and modifications. Make sure to learn the background of the instructor before beginning any class.

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