

Try Pilates For Cross Training Benefits

What Does Pilates Do For The Body?

- Helps strengthen all of the abdominal muscles
- Creates a strong, stable torso
- Decreases pressure on spinal joints & discs
- Fixes imbalances all over the body
- Improves posture & prevents injury
- Improves function in sports & everyday activities
- Mobilizes the spine & creates ease of movement
- Opens & releases the shoulders
- Helps maintain upright posture as we age

"Ouch, my lower back!" often follows with, "You need to strengthen your core." But what if traditional crunches aggravate that low back pain even more? Don't give up hope! Whether your low back pain is due to a sports injury, lack of exercise or too many years of sitting at a desk, Pilates offers many ways to strengthen the abdominal muscles - without ever doing a single crunch.

In fact, Pilates exercises can be more comfortable (and even more effective) than a traditional sit-up routine. While typical crunches can put pressure on the neck and create discomfort for someone with a back injury or pain, Pilates uses a library of exercises and machines to promote the strength and movement of muscles, and the stabilization of joints, while alleviating discomfort throughout the entire body, especially in the back and spine. This stability and focus on alignment is what makes Pilates safe for the majority of the population.

With many forms of exercise, we tend to overcompensate on one side if we have an injury, stiffness or lack of flexibility on the other side. This can create problems in other areas of the body, but "Pilates can guide people from pain into movement through precise, controlled exercises that develop deep postural support and improved self-awareness, especially with regard to alignment" says Pilates Instructor Dylan Thomas. "Clients can integrate the concepts learned during Pilates into their daily activities, whether sitting at a desk, working in the yard, or playing sports, so that they can move safely with greater spontaneity and ease."

Since it treats the body as a whole, rather than the sum of its parts, Pilates will not just strengthen your superficial rectus abdominus (the "six-pack" muscles) but it goes deeper, strengthening the obliques (the sides of the core) and transverse abdominus (the deepest abdominal muscles, that wrap around the inner core) to increase strength from the inside out. "Joseph Pilates called the abdominals the powerhouse of the body. When all those muscles work together, the torso is strong and stable, no matter what the arms and legs are doing," says Pilates Instructor Beth Lippman.

In any Pilates class or private session, you'll also gain breath awareness and learn conscious breathing techniques that will help you more effectively use your core muscles. You'll move

your spine safely in all planes of motion to keep it healthy and pliable rather than stiff and sore. In keeping with the theme of working from the inside out, Pilates places a heavy focus on posture and spinal health because discomfort in the back or spine can lead to pain in other areas of the body. A misalignment in the hips could result in pain all the way into the toes. In fact, Joseph Pilates used to say that a person is only as young as their spine is flexible.

Whether Pilates peaks your interest because you're rehabbing from injury, experiencing current low back pain (or any other pain), or you'd just like to improve your strength, flexibility and alignment to support your other sports or activities, it is something to be considered in your total health & fitness regime as a great cross training tool.

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