***Taiko Body / Taiko Life!***

***By Natalie Shoptaw, B.S., Pilates Instructor, Trainer, Brain Gym ® Consultant***

Increasing your core strength, flexibility, and muscle integrity improves one’s overall quality of life. As it pertains to playing Taiko, core strength translates into injury reduction. Having core strength and ease of movement --or not having them-- impacts us on a daily basis, certainly; but it’s critical in Taiko because it determines safely maintaining alignment and stamina. The very nature of playing Taiko, with large movements, sustained play, and hours of practice, practice, practice demands stamina. Yes, core strength keeps us out of the chiropractor’s office, at work, off of muscle relaxers, and out of pain, but most importantly: IT KEEPS TAIKO PLAYERS DRUMMING! When it comes to Taiko, core strength keeps drummers safe and stable while fine tuning a great stance, and maintaining the great stance while working on perfecting technique. Strength and range of motion enable Taiko players to create movements inherently necessary within Taiko, injury free. When the core is out of shape or not engaged properly during drumming, then compensatory body movements will emerge. One such example would be an over-dependence on the shoulder girdles to deliver power, which, over time, could likely lead to overuse injury and/or damage. With proper core engagement and use, the power would come from a collaboration of larger muscles in the upper back, chest, and latissimus dorsi

Today, let’s start with The Core of the core: finding, strengthening and developing this cornerstone. Joseph Pilates called it The

Powerhouse. The core begins with the pelvic floor functioning a bit like a “piston” within the abdominal cavity “cylinder”.We’ll be synchronizing our breathing with our movements to get the most of out of our core conditioning time and effort. Get out your exercise mat, and let’s get started!

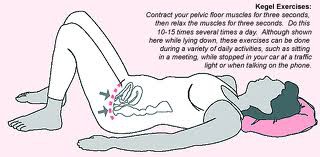
Neutral Spine and Core Activation

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor (sometimes called hook position). Push your shoulder blades down your back, and settle. Line your ankles and knees up in a straight line with your hip bones on the front side of your body. The weight of your feet should be centered with your second toe on each foot and the position of your feet should have a very slight duck foot, outward rotation, or V position to them.

2. Draw a long slow breath in through the nose. During each inhale, always expand the ribs out to the side as the lungs fill. As

you slowly exhale through the mouth, slowly nod your head as though you are nodding yes, and then release the head. Your head likely will have landed in what is known in Pilates as cervical neutral, with a slight nod remaining in place. It is as though your head is nodded just enough that it could gently support a grapefruit on the neck beneath the chin. Keep that slight cervical nod in place for the future.

3. Visualize yourself wearing a bikini bottom, or speedo. Tune into the backside of the body where the top elastic holds the speedo in place above the glutes. Draw another long slow inhale through the nose. With this exhale, visualize the spine of a skeleton. Visualize the very last tippy end of the tail bone. Begin tipping the tippy end of the tailbone toward the ceiling until the speedo elastic band on the



backside touches the mat. Hold the alignment in place. You should feel that there is a much denser connection on the backside of the body at the locations where the pelvis and rib cage meet the floor and a less dense connection where the lumbar meets the floor.

4. Chances are good that you are now in neutral spine and ready

to add on. Holding neutral spine, draw another long slow inhale through the nose. Exhale slowly through the

mouth and activate the pelvic floor with a Kegel. (Kegel

explanation for women: visualize stopping urination

mid-flow. For men: visualize wearing the speedo as you walk into the cold ocean; the moment the speedo and the ocean connect, there is a “lift” sensation – that’s a Kegel.).

5. Repeat #4 and after you again activate the pelvic floor with the Kegel, pull the belly button inward, towards the mat, as though the belly button is trying to touch the spine, and flatten the abdominals from sternum to pubic bone.

6. Repeat #5

7. Repeat #5 but after flattening the tummy, pretend you are holding a quarter between the glutes.

8. Repeat # 7

Perfecting this short routine, through daily practice, and strengthening the piston of our Taiko engine block is the beginning of more fitness tips to come in subsequent editions of Don Tsuku Taiko Magazine.