

The Definitive Pilates Encyclopedia: Q through Z

The final volume of this comprehensive reference covers 150+ essential Pilates terms spanning exercises, equipment, anatomy, historical figures, principles, and instructional cueing. This encyclopedia completes the A-Z series, providing practitioners, instructors, and students with detailed entries on everything from the iconic Reformer and Romana Kryzanowska to the foundational "zipper" cue and Wunda Chair repertoire. Each entry includes definition, context, practical application, and connections to related terminology.

Q

Quadruped

Category: Foundational Position

The quadruped position places the body on "all fours" — hands directly under shoulders, knees directly under hips — [VAURA Pilates](#) with a neutral spine maintained throughout. [Complete Pilates](#) This fundamental position develops core stability, spinal alignment, and the critical skill of hip-shoulder dissociation that underlies much of Pilates movement.

In quadruped, the **transversus abdominis** engages to support the spine while the practitioner learns to move limbs independently without disturbing trunk alignment. Common exercises from this position include Bird Dog (opposite arm-leg extension), Cat-Cow for spinal mobility, [NAPA](#) and Thread the Needle for thoracic rotation. [NAPA Center](#) The position also serves as preparation for the Knee Stretch series on the Reformer.

[Pilates Anytime](#)

Related terms: Table Top Position, All Fours, Neutral Spine

Quadratus Lumborum (QL)

Category: Anatomy

The quadratus lumborum is a deep, quadrangular muscle of the posterior abdominal wall connecting the 12th rib to the transverse processes of L1-L5 vertebrae and the posterior iliac crest. This muscle performs lateral flexion (side bending), assists with breathing by stabilizing the lower ribs, and extends the lumbar spine when both sides contract simultaneously.

In Pilates practice, the QL plays a crucial role in exercises involving side bending—Mermaid, Side Bend, and side-lying work. The muscle frequently becomes overactive and tight in individuals with lower back pain, compensating for weak core musculature. Pilates exercises help balance QL activity while promoting proper

recruitment patterns, teaching practitioners to differentiate between appropriate engagement and excessive tension.

Key exercises: Mermaid, Side Bend, Cat-Cow, Side Lying Series

Quadriceps

Category: Anatomy

The quadriceps comprise four muscles on the anterior thigh: **rectus femoris**, **vastus lateralis**, **vastus medialis**, and **vastus intermedius**. [\(pilatesanytime\)](#) Collectively responsible for knee extension, this muscle group powers Footwork on the Reformer, leg press movements, lunges, and standing exercises.

Pilates emphasizes balanced development between quadriceps and hamstrings—a critical consideration since modern sedentary lifestyles often create quad dominance and hamstring weakness. The rectus femoris additionally assists hip flexion, making it active during exercises like Leg Circles and Single Leg Stretch. The **vastus medialis oblique (VMO)** receives particular attention in Pilates rehabilitation work, as its strength is essential for proper knee tracking and stability.

Key exercises: Reformer Footwork, Front Splits, Standing Leg Press, Lunges

R

Reach

Category: Cueing Language

One of the most frequently used Pilates cues, "reach" instructs practitioners to extend or lengthen a body part away from the center, creating length, space, and dynamic tension throughout the body. The cue embodies the Pilates principle of **opposition**—energy simultaneously extending in multiple directions.

Common applications include "reach through your fingertips," "reach through the crown of your head," and "reach your legs long away from your center." This cue helps practitioners understand that Pilates movement involves active lengthening rather than passive positioning, creating the characteristic long, lean muscle development the method is known for.

Related terms: Lengthen, Extend, Opposition, Two-Way Stretch

Rectus Abdominis

Category: Anatomy

The rectus abdominis is the long, paired muscle extending vertically along the anterior abdomen, from the pubic crest to the 5th-7th costal cartilages. Known colloquially as the "six-pack" due to its segmented appearance created by tendinous intersections, this muscle performs spinal flexion, posterior pelvic tilt, and compression of abdominal contents.

In Pilates, the rectus abdominis serves as the primary mover in exercises involving trunk curling—Roll Up, Roll Over, The Hundred, and Teaser. However, the method emphasizes working the rectus as part of an **integrated core system** rather than in isolation. The transversus abdominis provides deep stability while the rectus generates movement, creating the controlled, articulated spinal motion characteristic of Pilates.

Key exercises: Roll Up, The Hundred, Criss Cross, Teaser

Reformer

Category: Equipment/Apparatus

The Reformer stands as the most iconic piece of Pilates equipment, originally named the "Universal Reformer" by Joseph Pilates to signify its ability to "reform" the entire body. (Pilates Anytime) This apparatus consists of an elevated frame supporting a sliding carriage, spring resistance system, adjustable footbar, shoulder blocks, and ropes with handles or straps. (Sheppardmethodpilates)

Historical development: Joseph Pilates conceived the Reformer around 1912-1920 while interned in England during World War I, where he attached springs to hospital beds to help bedridden patients exercise.

(SOMA Movement Studio) After emigrating to the United States in 1926, he refined and patented the Universal Reformer, with **Gratz Industries** producing the first commercial units in 1965 under the guidance of Pilates and Romana Kryzanowska.

Key components:

- **Carriage:** Sliding platform accommodating lying, sitting, kneeling, or standing positions (Legacyapparatus) (Pilates Anytime)
- **Springs:** Four to five springs of varying resistance (light/medium/heavy) providing both challenge and support
- **Footbar:** Adjustable bar for foot or hand placement
- **Shoulder blocks:** Padded blocks preventing sliding during footwork
- **Straps/Ropes:** Attached to the carriage for arm and leg exercises (Legacyapparatus)
- **Box:** Removable platform for Long Box and Short Box positions

The Reformer offers over **100 exercises** across all body positions, with spring resistance simultaneously challenging strength while supporting proper alignment. Modern variations include 80-inch classic models,

extended 86-inch and 89-inch versions for taller practitioners, and Tower attachments converting the Reformer into a combination apparatus.

Resistance Bands (Therabands)

Category: Props/Accessories

Elastic bands providing variable resistance for stretching and strengthening, resistance bands have become essential Pilates props—particularly for mat work and home practice. [Pilates Anytime](#) [Complete Pilates](#) Available in graduated resistance levels typically indicated by color [Complete Pilates](#) (yellow for light through black for heavy), these versatile tools simulate Reformer spring tension without requiring apparatus.

Applications include assisted stretching, added resistance for arm and leg work, and modifications for practitioners with flexibility limitations. [Complete Pilates](#) Bands can assist the Roll Up by providing traction, add challenge to Leg Circles, and offer feedback for proper alignment during shoulder work. Their portability makes them invaluable for maintaining practice while traveling.

Related terms: Theraband, Stretch Band, Exercise Bands

Retraction (Scapular Retraction)

Category: Cueing Language/Anatomical Movement

Scapular retraction describes the movement of shoulder blades toward the spine, bringing them together on the back—the opposite of protraction. This fundamental movement activates the rhomboids and middle trapezius, [Ellie Herman Pilates](#) essential muscles for proper upper back engagement and posture. [pilatesanytime](#)

In Pilates, retraction cues frequently accompany exercises like Rowing, Swan, and arm work: "Draw your shoulder blades together," "Pull your shoulders back and down," or "Squeeze your shoulder blades toward your spine." Proper scapular mechanics underpin all upper body work and weight-bearing exercises, making retraction awareness foundational for safe, effective practice.

Return to Life Through Contrology

Category: Historical Publication

Joseph Pilates' seminal book, published in 1945 and co-written with William John Miller, contains his philosophy on health and fitness alongside the original **34 mat exercises** with detailed instructions. Photographs of the 60-year-old Pilates demonstrating each exercise provide a visual record of authentic Contrology.

The book opens with Pilates' beliefs about modern lifestyle's degradation of physical health and presents his method as a complete system for restoration. His philosophy centers on the integration of mind and body—hence "Contrology," the study of control. The text addresses posture, body mechanics, breathing, and spinal flexibility as foundational elements of health.

Return to Life remains essential reading for understanding classical Pilates. The 34 exercises presented—from The Hundred through Push-Up—continue to form the foundation of mat Pilates worldwide, with instructors still teaching these movements in their original sequence more than 75 years later.

Related terms: Contrology, Classical Pilates, Original 34

Rhomboids (Major and Minor)

Category: Anatomy

The rhomboid muscles—rhomboid minor (originating from C7-T1) and rhomboid major (from T2-T5)—form two parallel bands between the spine and the medial border of the scapula. These muscles retract the shoulder blades, perform downward rotation, and stabilize the scapulae against the rib cage.

In Pilates, properly functioning rhomboids are essential for good posture and shoulder girdle stability. These muscles engage during the Rowing series, Chest Expansion, Swan, and Pulling Straps. They frequently present as weak and lengthened in individuals with forward-rounded shoulders (the "computer posture" epidemic), making their targeted strengthening a priority for many practitioners.

Ribs to Hips

Category: Cueing Language

This fundamental cue instructs practitioners to maintain connection between the lower ribs and hip bones, engaging the obliques and preventing the common fault of "rib flare"—where the lower ribs protrude forward and upward, creating excessive lumbar extension.

The cue proves especially important during arm movements overhead and spinal extension exercises, where the tendency to arch the lower back and flare the ribs compromises core engagement and spinal safety. Alternative phrasings include "knit your ribs together," "close the front of your ribs," and "soften your ribs down."

Pilates Anytime This connection maintains integrated core engagement throughout movement.

Rocking

Category: Exercise/Movement

Rocking describes a dynamic movement pattern where the body maintains an arched (extended) shape while shifting weight forward and back in a seesaw motion. The most prominent rocking exercise appears in **Swan Dive/Swan Rock**, where the practitioner lies prone, lifts into extension, then rocks forward (chest down, legs up) and back (chest up, legs down) while maintaining the arc.

This advanced movement requires strong back extensors, hip extensors, and precise core control. The movement emerges from the entire posterior chain working in coordination—not from momentum. Some practitioners perform Rocking by grabbing their ankles in a bow shape, though this variation demands significant shoulder and back flexibility.

Muscles targeted: Erector spinae, gluteus maximus, hamstrings, core stabilizers

Roll Back Bar

Category: Equipment/Accessory

A wooden or metal bar attached to springs on the Cadillac/Trapeze Table, the Roll Back Bar facilitates seated exercises requiring trunk flexion and extension. Spring assistance supports the movement while challenging control, making it ideal for learning spinal articulation and developing abdominal strength with proper form.

The Roll Back Bar exercises teach the C-curve shape fundamental to Pilates, helping practitioners understand how to sequentially move through each vertebra while maintaining core engagement. This apparatus component proves particularly valuable for individuals learning the Roll Up movement pattern.

Roll Down

Category: Exercise/Movement

The Roll Down is a fundamental movement pattern where the spine articulates sequentially—either from standing to forward fold or from sitting to supine position—moving "bone by bone" through each vertebra. This movement teaches spinal articulation and control while providing a hamstring stretch.

Initiation begins from the head, with each vertebra "peeling" off an imaginary wall behind the practitioner. The abdominals maintain a C-curve throughout, controlling the descent rather than collapsing into gravity. The Roll Down frequently serves as a warm-up exercise, preparing the spine for more demanding work.

Cueing: "Roll down through your spine one vertebra at a time," "Peel your spine away from the wall"

Roll Over

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The third exercise in the classical Pilates mat order, Roll Over involves lying supine, lifting the legs overhead until the hips leave the mat, articulating through the spine as the legs reach toward the floor behind the head, then rolling back down with control.

Technical execution:

1. Start supine with arms by sides, legs at 90 degrees
2. Exhale, lifting legs overhead, pelvis lifting as spine peels off mat sequentially
3. Legs reach toward floor behind head, then open to shoulder width
4. Flex feet and roll down with control, legs returning to start

The Roll Over develops spinal articulation, stretches the hamstrings and back, provides a massage for the spine, and strengthens the abdominals. It is contraindicated for individuals with neck issues, osteoporosis, glaucoma, or during pregnancy due to the inverted position and spinal load.

Roll Up

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The second exercise in the classical mat order, the Roll Up challenges practitioners to curl up sequentially from supine (arms overhead) to reach toward the toes, then roll back down with control—all without using momentum or allowing the feet to lift.

Technical execution:

1. Start supine with arms extended overhead, legs together and long
2. Inhale to prepare; exhale as arms lift, chin nods, and spine peels off mat sequentially
3. Reach toward toes with a C-curve in the spine
4. Inhale at top; exhale to reverse the motion with control

The Roll Up serves as both an exercise and an assessment tool—a practitioner's ability to perform a controlled Roll Up reveals spinal flexibility, abdominal strength, and hip flexor length. Common challenges include feet lifting, using momentum, and "flat spots" where the spine moves in sections rather than articulating smoothly.

Modifications: Bent knees, resistance band for assistance, half roll back

Rolling Like a Ball

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

This foundational exercise holds the body in a tight ball shape (deep C-curve) while rolling backward to the shoulder blades and returning to balance on the sacrum—without letting the feet touch the floor. Named for its similarity to a ball rolling on a surface, this exercise massages the spine while building core control.

Technical execution:

1. Sit with hips close to heels, knees bent, hands holding outsides of ankles
2. Lift feet, finding balance on sacrum with knees shoulder-width apart, heels together
3. Inhale to roll back to shoulder blades (never onto neck)
4. Exhale to roll up and balance, maintaining the ball shape throughout

Rolling Like a Ball develops trunk stabilization, provides spinal massage, and tests core strength and control. The challenge lies in maintaining the exact same shape throughout—neither opening up on the roll back nor tucking tighter to return. This exercise prepares practitioners for more advanced rolling movements like Open Leg Rocker and Seal.

Repetitions: 6-8 times

Roller (Foam Roller)

Category: Props/Accessories

A cylindrical foam prop (typically 36 inches long by 6 inches diameter) used in Pilates for balance challenges, myofascial release, stretching, and exercise modification. Foam rollers come in varying densities—soft (white), medium (blue), firm (black)—with smooth surfaces preferred for Pilates balance work versus textured surfaces for massage.

Applications include lying on the roller (spine aligned lengthwise) to challenge stability during arm or leg movements, using the roller under the pelvis for bridging variations, or placing it under the shins during quadruped work. The roller can simulate aspects of Reformer work for home practice and serves as an accessible tool for developing the proprioception essential to Pilates.

Romana Kryzanowska

Category: Historical Figure

Born: June 30, 1923, Farmington, Michigan [Wikipedia](#)

Died: August 30, 2013 [Wikipedia](#)

Known as "The Grand Dame of Pilates," Romana Kryzanowska bears primary responsibility for preserving and spreading Joseph Pilates' original method worldwide. A professionally trained dancer from the School of American Ballet under George Balanchine, she suffered an ankle injury at age 17-18 that led Balanchine to refer her to Joseph Pilates.

Pilates rehabilitated her ankle in just five sessions—so impressing Romana that she became his protégé and assistant. [Lifespan Pilates](#) After marrying Pablo Mejia and living in Peru during the 1940s-50s, she returned to New York in 1958 to work alongside Joe and Clara Pilates. Following Joseph Pilates' death in 1967, Romana continued with Clara and eventually became director of The Pilates Studio.

For over 60 years, Romana traveled worldwide teaching and certifying instructors, never deviating from the original work as Joseph Pilates taught it. She founded **Romana's Pilates** with her daughter Sari Mejia-Santo and granddaughter Daria Pace, creating a rigorous apprenticeship-based training program. Most modern Pilates lineages trace directly or indirectly back to Romana's teaching, making her influence on the contemporary Pilates landscape incalculable.

Romana's Pilates

Category: Certification/Method

The international teacher training and certification program founded by Romana Kryzanowska to preserve Joseph Pilates' original method, now led by her daughter Sari Mejia-Santo and granddaughter Daria Pace.

Distinguishing characteristics:

- Rigorous apprenticeship-based training (not weekend certification) [Flexhk](#)
- Teaches authentic classical Pilates exactly as Joseph Pilates intended
- Uses original exercise order and Gratz equipment specifications
- Handpicked Instructor Trainers mentored by the family lineage
- Proprietary leveling system for instructor certification

The program's philosophy centers on "authentic" and "original method" terminology, rejecting contemporary modifications or additions. Romana's Pilates represents one of the primary custodians of classical Pilates tradition.

Ron Fletcher

Category: Historical Figure

Born: May 29, 1921, Dogtown, Missouri

Died: December 6, 2011

A Martha Graham company dancer who studied with Joseph and Clara Pilates from 1948-1968, Ron Fletcher is credited with keeping Pilates alive during a period when the method might have faded into obscurity and with bringing it to mainstream America through his Hollywood studio.

After struggling with alcoholism and returning to Clara's studio for recovery, Fletcher opened the first West Coast Pilates studio in Beverly Hills (1971-1972), calling it "Ron Fletcher Studio for Body Contrology." His celebrity clientele—including Ali MacGraw, Barbra Streisand, Candice Bergen, and Nancy Reagan—generated the publicity that introduced Pilates to American popular culture.

Fletcher's innovations:

- **Fletcher Floorwork:** Mat-based Pilates without apparatus
- **Fletcher Towelwork:** Using a braided towel for shoulder mobility
- **Percussive Breathing:** Rhythmic breath technique integrated with movement
- **"Taking Pilates vertical":** Extensive standing work development

Fletcher published "Every Body is Beautiful" in 1978 and founded the Fletcher Pilates education program, training thousands of instructors in his distinctive approach that integrated Graham technique with Contrology principles.

Rotator Cuff

Category: Anatomy

The rotator cuff comprises four muscles and their tendons—**Supraspinatus**, **Infraspinatus**, **Teres Minor**, and **Subscapularis** (remembered as SITS)—that stabilize the shoulder joint and rotate the humerus. These muscles connect the scapula to the humeral head, creating a dynamic stabilization system essential for all arm movements.

Pilates exercises strengthen the rotator cuff while promoting proper scapular mechanics. Arm Circles, the Rowing series, Pulling Straps, Chest Expansion, and arm spring work all engage these stabilizing muscles. Proper rotator cuff function prevents impingement, supports healthy shoulder mechanics, and allows the full range of upper body exercises in the Pilates repertoire.

Rowing Series

Category: Classical Exercise Series

A series of six seated exercises performed on the Reformer using straps/handles, the Rowing series develops trunk control, scapular stability, and spinal articulation while challenging the entire upper body.

The six Rowing exercises:

1. **Rowing 1 (Into the Sternum):** Round back, arms pull to sternum, extend
2. **Rowing 2 (90 Degrees/Tall Back):** Tall back, arms reach forward
3. **Rowing 3 (From the Chest):** Tall back, arms reach forward and open wide
4. **Rowing 4 (From the Hips):** Reach forward, round over legs, lift back up
5. **Rowing 5 (Shave):** Arms behind head, extend upward
6. **Rowing 6 (Hug):** Arms open to sides, "hug" together in front

The series is typically learned in reverse order (5-6 first, then 3-4, then 1-2) as complexity increases. Spring setting usually involves one medium or light spring, emphasizing control over resistance.

S

Sacrum

Category: Anatomy

The sacrum is the triangular bone at the base of the spine, below the lumbar vertebrae and above the coccyx (tailbone), forming the center of the pelvis. In Pilates, the sacrum serves as the balance point for rolling exercises like Rolling Like a Ball and Seal, and as a critical reference point for pelvic placement cues.

Understanding the sacrum's position helps practitioners find proper spinal alignment. "Balance on your sacrum" differs from "balance on your tailbone"—the sacrum provides a broader, more stable surface for exercises requiring sustained balance in a tucked position.

Saw

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The eleventh exercise in the classical mat order, the Saw combines spinal rotation with forward flexion in a "sawing" motion of the fingers across the little toe. Named for this distinctive movement, the exercise wrings

stale air from the lungs while stretching the spine and hamstrings.

Technical execution:

1. Sit tall with legs extended wider than mat width, feet flexed, arms wide at shoulder height
2. Inhale to prepare; exhale and twist torso to one side
3. Reach opposite hand toward little toe in sawing motion, pulsing three times
4. Inhale to return to center; repeat to other side

The Saw strengthens respiratory muscles, twists and lengthens the spine, stretches hamstrings, and aids digestion by massaging internal organs. Critical technique points include keeping the opposite hip anchored and maintaining abdominal engagement rather than simply folding forward.

Scissors (Mat)

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The sixteenth exercise in the classical order, Scissors is an intermediate supine exercise featuring alternating leg movements in a scissoring action while in an inverted position with hips lifted overhead.

Technical execution:

1. Lie on back, roll through spine lifting hips overhead, hands supporting lower back or hips
2. Extend legs toward ceiling
3. Split legs—one reaching toward mat, opposite pulsing toward chest twice
4. Switch legs continuously with control

Scissors develops abdominal strength, hip flexibility, and shoulder stability while stretching the hamstrings. The inverted position means this exercise is contraindicated for those with neck or shoulder issues.

Related exercises: High Scissors, Bicycle

Scoop

Category: Cueing Language

Perhaps the most quintessential Pilates cue, "scoop" instructs drawing the lower abdominals inward and upward toward the spine—engaging deep core muscles, particularly the **transversus abdominis** and pelvic floor.

Common imagery:

- "Hollow out your belly like a greyhound"
- "Zip up tight pants"
- "Pull your belly button to your spine"
- "Create a bowl with your abdominals"

The scoop creates the foundation for all Pilates movement, providing core stability and protecting the lower back. Importantly, the pelvis typically remains in neutral during the scoop—the cue refers to muscular engagement rather than spinal flattening.

Seal

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The thirtieth exercise in the classical order, Seal is an advanced rolling exercise performed with hands laced through the legs, resembling a seal clapping its flippers. Three "claps" of the feet occur at both the top and bottom of the roll.

Technical execution:

1. Sit with knees bent, lace hands between legs holding outsides of ankles
2. Feet together, knees shoulder-distance apart, create deep C-curve
3. Lift feet and clap three times
4. Roll back to shoulder blades (head never touches mat), clap three times
5. Roll up to balance, clap three times; repeat

Seal develops trunk stabilization, provides spinal massage, and serves as a cooling exercise near the end of the mat series. The clapping action challenges practitioners to maintain stability at both ends of the movement.

Serratus Anterior

Category: Anatomy

Known as the "boxer's muscle" or "big swing muscle," the serratus anterior is a fan-shaped muscle originating on ribs 1-8/9 and inserting on the medial border of the scapula, wrapping around the ribcage like fingers.

This muscle primarily protracts the scapula (pulls it forward around the ribcage), assists upward rotation, and stabilizes the scapula against the ribs. In Pilates, properly functioning serratus anterior prevents "scapular winging" during planks and push-ups, making it essential for weight-bearing exercises.

Key exercises for serratus anterior: Push-Up, Long Stretch, Elephant, Pike, any plank variation

Short Box Series

Category: Classical Exercise Series (Reformer)

A comprehensive series performed seated on the Short Box across the Reformer, encompassing all spinal movements—flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation.

Setup: Box placed perpendicular to the carriage over shoulder rests, feet secured under the footstrap, sitting one hand-width from the back edge of the box.

Component exercises:

1. **Round (Hug):** C-curve flexion rolling back and up
2. **Flat (Tall):** Hinging back with straight spine while holding pole
3. **Side to Side:** Lateral flexion with pole overhead
4. **Twist & Reach:** Rotation with diagonal reach
5. **Tree:** Single leg stretch with climbing action up the leg
6. **Around the World:** Combined rotation, extension, and lateral flexion

The Short Box Series teaches practitioners to control their spine through every plane of motion while challenging abdominal strength and spinal mobility.

Short Spine (Short Spine Massage)

Category: Classical Reformer Exercise

An intermediate Reformer exercise with feet in straps, articulating the spine with hip flexion similar to Roll Over but with the support and feedback of the apparatus.

Technical execution:

1. Lie supine on Reformer, feet in straps, legs extended at 45 degrees
2. Bend knees toward chest, then extend legs over head (like Roll Over)

3. Bend knees to ears, framing the face
4. Roll spine down vertebra by vertebra while maintaining knee position
5. Release and extend to starting position

Short Spine provides a spinal massage and articulation practice, hip flexor stretch, and hamstring flexibility work—all with the Reformer springs providing feedback and support.

Shoulder Bridge

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The eighteenth exercise in the classical order, Shoulder Bridge is a supine bridge with optional leg kicks that strengthens the posterior chain while improving hip mobility and spinal articulation.

Basic version: Articulate through the spine to lift hips into bridge position, then lower with control—teaching segmental spinal movement.

Advanced version: In bridge position, place hands under hips for support, extend one leg straight up, kick the leg to ceiling and lower with control. Repeat kicks before switching legs.

Shoulder Bridge targets gluteus maximus, hamstrings, abdominals, and back extensors while stretching hip flexors and quadriceps.

Shoulder Blocks

Category: Equipment Component

Padded blocks positioned on either side of the Reformer headrest, shoulder blocks prevent practitioners from sliding during footwork ([Sheppardmethodpilates](#)) and provide positioning reference points. During exercises like Footwork and Long Stretch, the shoulder blocks stabilize the body; in other exercises, they serve as landmarks for proper alignment.

Side Bend

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The twenty-seventh exercise in the classical order, Side Bend is an advanced lateral exercise performed from a side plank position, creating an arc with the body as the hips lift.

Technical execution:

1. Sit on one hip, bottom hand on mat with fingers pointing away
2. Legs stacked and extended, top arm by side
3. Inhale to prepare; exhale pressing through bottom hand and feet
4. Lift hips and sweep top arm overhead, creating arc from fingertips to feet
5. Inhale to lower with control

Side Bend develops lateral strength and stability, strengthens the connection between arms and core, and requires the obliques, quadratus lumborum, and shoulder stabilizers to work in coordination.

Side Kick Series (Side Lying Series)

Category: Classical Exercise Series

A comprehensive series of exercises performed lying on one side, targeting hip strength, stability, and range of motion through various leg movements.

Core exercises in the series:

- **Front/Back:** Top leg kicks forward (twice) then reaches back (twice)
- **Up/Down:** Top leg lifts up (pointed foot) and lowers down (flexed foot)
- **Small Circles:** Top leg draws small circles
- **Big Circles:** Top leg draws large circles
- **Bicycle:** Top leg moves in cycling motion forward and reverse
- **Hot Potato:** Top leg taps front and back with decreasing counts (5-4-3-2-1)
- **Inner Thigh Lifts:** Bottom leg lifts
- **Grande Ronde de Jambe:** Large circular leg movements
- **Big Scissors:** Both legs lift and scissor

Setup: Lie on side at back edge of mat, body aligned, legs positioned slightly forward (30-45 degrees) for stability. Upper hip remains stacked on lower hip throughout—no rolling back. Pilates Encyclopedia

Single Leg Stretch

Category: Classical Mat Exercise (Stomach Series)

Part of the Stomach Series (Series of Five), Single Leg Stretch is a supine abdominal exercise alternating legs with coordinated arm movements.

Technical execution:

1. Lie on back, curl head and shoulders up, pull one knee into chest
2. Extend opposite leg to 45 degrees (or higher for modification)
3. Place hands on bent knee (outside hand to ankle, inside hand to knee)
4. Switch legs smoothly while maintaining lifted position
5. Coordinate breath: exhale as you switch, inhale as you switch

Single Leg Stretch develops core strength, coordination, and stabilization while challenging the practitioner to maintain trunk stability during asymmetrical leg movement.

Six Principles of Pilates

Category: Foundational Principles

First articulated in "The Pilates Method of Physical and Mental Conditioning" (1980) by Philip Friedman and Gail Eisen (students of Romana Kryzanowska), the Six Principles distill Joseph Pilates' teachings into foundational concepts:

- 1. Centering:** All movement begins from the center—the Powerhouse encompassing abdominals, lower back, hips, and buttocks. The center is both the physical core and the energetic source of movement.
 - 2. Concentration:** Full mental attention accompanies each exercise. The mind-body connection enhances effectiveness and ensures correct, safe execution.
 - 3. Control:** Joseph Pilates named his method "Contrology"—every movement performed with complete muscular control. No body part is left to move on its own.
 - 4. Precision:** Each movement has an exact purpose and placement. The same exercise challenges beginners and advanced practitioners differently based on precision of execution.
 - 5. Breath:** Integral to Pilates, breathing coordinates with movement. Joseph Pilates emphasized using lungs as bellows, pumping air fully in and out. Lateral breathing maintains core engagement.
 - 6. Flow:** Smooth, uninterrupted movement connects exercises. As Romana Kryzanowska described it, "flowing motion outward from a strong center."
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Snake

Category: Classical Reformer Exercise

An advanced exercise combining side-bending with optional spinal twist, Snake challenges full-body integration, lateral strength, and shoulder stability.

From a side-facing position on the Reformer, the practitioner presses the carriage out while creating a lateral arc through the body. The **Snake Twist** variation adds a rotational element as the body spirals.

Prerequisites: Proficiency in Side Bend, strong arm-to-core connection, established shoulder stability

Spine Corrector

Category: Equipment/Apparatus

A curved, barrel-shaped apparatus with a step or platform portion, the Spine Corrector (also called Step Barrel or Clara Step Barrel) supports and challenges the spine through various movements. Joseph Pilates designed this piece, and variations include the East Coast style (shallower well) and West Coast style.

Applications:

- Opening the chest and restoring natural spinal curves
- Strengthening abdominal, back, and shoulder muscles
- Spinal extension, flexion, lateral flexion, and rotation exercises
- Counteracting effects of poor posture
- Enhancing breathing through chest opening

The Spine Corrector proves particularly valuable for exercises like Short Box Series variations, Swan, Swimming, and side work, providing support that allows practitioners to focus on movement quality rather than struggling to maintain position.

Spine Stretch (Forward)

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The fifth exercise in the classical order, Spine Stretch Forward emphasizes sequential spinal articulation in forward flexion.

Technical execution:

1. Sit tall with legs extended slightly wider than shoulders, feet flexed
2. Arms reach forward at shoulder height
3. Inhale to grow tall; exhale to curl forward one vertebra at a time
4. Crown of head reaches toward mat while arms stay parallel to floor
5. Inhale to restack spine from tailbone upward

The key distinction from simply stretching forward is the lift of the abdominals away from the thighs—the C-curve involves lengthening through the spine rather than collapsing.

Spine Twist (Seated)

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The nineteenth exercise in the classical order, Spine Twist is a seated rotational exercise improving thoracic mobility.

Technical execution:

1. Sit tall with legs extended together, feet flexed
2. Arms in T-position at shoulder height
3. Inhale to grow tall; exhale to rotate torso to one side, pulsing twice at end range
4. Inhale to return to center; repeat other side

The twist initiates from the bottom ribs—the arms move with the spine, not ahead of it. The pelvis remains stable throughout, with rotation occurring exclusively in the thoracic spine.

Contraindications: Osteoporosis, sacroiliac dysfunction, some lower back pathologies

Springs

Category: Equipment Component

The coiled metal springs providing resistance on Pilates apparatus (Reformer, Cadillac, Chair) form the heart of equipment-based Pilates. Different colors indicate different resistance levels, though specific colors vary by manufacturer:

- **Light springs:** Lower resistance for arm work and gentle exercises
- **Medium springs:** Standard resistance for most exercises

- **Heavy springs:** Greater resistance for leg work and strength-focused exercises

A critical principle: **fewer springs create more stability challenge** (the carriage moves more freely), while **more springs create more resistance** (the carriage is harder to move). This counterintuitive relationship means that sometimes adding springs makes exercises easier, not harder.

Stability Ball (Swiss Ball)

Category: Props/Accessories

A large inflatable ball (typically 55-75cm diameter) used for balance challenges, core stability work, and exercise variations. The unstable surface forces deep stabilizing muscles to engage continuously.

Applications:

- Creates unstable surface challenging core stabilizers
- Supports elevated positions helpful for prenatal, elderly, or rehabilitating practitioners
- Adds weight and resistance to movements
- Provides softer surface for exercises

Exercises: Pelvic Curls, Pike, Plank, Bridge, Back Extension, Side Bends

STOTT Pilates

Category: Certification/Method

Founded in 1988 by **Moira Merrithew** (née Stott) and **Lindsay G. Merrithew** in Toronto, Canada, STOTT Pilates represents a contemporary approach integrating modern exercise science with Pilates principles. Often called the "Ivy League of Pilates Education."

Key distinctions from classical Pilates:

- Maintains neutral spine posture (versus the flattened lumbar position in classical work)
- Integrates contemporary exercise science, fascial fitness, and spinal rehabilitation principles
- Evidence-based approach emphasizing anatomy and biomechanics
- Incorporates props like stability balls, foam rollers, and BOSU balls

Moira Merrithew, a former principal dancer with City Ballet of Toronto, studied with Romana Kryzanowska after career-ending foot injuries, then developed her contemporary methodology. STOTT Pilates has trained over **30,000 instructors** at more than 100 training centers worldwide, with courses recognized by organizations including the American Council on Exercise (ACE).

Straps (Loops)

Category: Equipment Component

Fabric, leather, or rope attachments on the Reformer and Cadillac used for hands or feet during exercises. Types include:

- **Double Loops:** Two integrated loops (shorter for hands, longer for feet)
 - **Tri Loops:** Three loops including Y-loop for foot/ankle support
 - **Traditional Leather Straps:** Original Joseph Pilates style
 - **Cotton Web Straps:** Used with fuzzies on Trapeze Table
 - **Padded Loops:** Neoprene-lined for comfort
-

Supine

Category: Anatomical Position

The body position lying on the back, face up. Supine serves as the starting position for many foundational Pilates exercises: The Hundred, Leg Circles, Roll Up, Rolling Like a Ball, and the entire Stomach Series begin in supine.

Related positions: Prone (face down), Side-lying

Swan

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

A prone back extension exercise developing the posterior chain while opening the chest—similar to yoga's Cobra.

Swan Prep (Beginner):

1. Lie prone with hands by shoulders, elbows close to body

2. Press hip bones into mat, lift abdominals away from floor
3. Slowly lift chest using back muscles (minimal arm push initially)
4. Float hands to test back strength
5. Lower with control

Swan Dive (Advanced): From full Swan extension, release arms forward and rock—forward onto thighs (legs lift), backward onto chest (arms reach). This creates a rocking chair motion powered by the back extensors and glutes.

Swan strengthens back extensors, stretches the anterior chain, opens the chest, and reverses the effects of seated posture.

Swimming

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

The twenty-fourth exercise in the classical order, Swimming is a prone exercise with alternating arm and leg lifts simulating swimming motion.

Technical execution:

1. Lie prone with arms extended overhead, legs together
2. Lift head, chest, arms, and legs off mat simultaneously
3. Flutter opposite arm and leg rhythmically
4. Breathe: inhale for 5 counts, exhale for 5 counts

Swimming strengthens the entire posterior chain—gluteals, hamstrings, back extensors—while developing coordination and reversing the effects of prolonged sitting. The face stays directed toward the mat (rather than lifting the chin), protecting the cervical spine.

T

Tabletop

Category: Foundational Position

A supine position with hips and knees bent at 90-degree angles, shins parallel to the ceiling—creating a shape resembling a table with the legs. Tabletop serves as the preparatory position for many abdominal exercises and

teaches pelvic stability and core engagement.

Cueing: "Float your leg into tabletop," "Keep your shins parallel to the ceiling," "Maintain 90-90 at your hips and knees"

Tailbone (Coccyx)

Category: Anatomical Reference/Cueing

The small triangular bone at the base of the spine, frequently referenced in Pilates cueing for pelvic positioning:

- "Tuck your tailbone under" (posterior pelvic tilt)
 - "Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor"
 - "Balance on your tailbone" (Teaser position)
 - "Reach your tailbone toward your heels"
-

Teaser

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

Often called the "hallmark of Pilates," the Teaser (#22 in the classical order) demonstrates the integration of strength, flexibility, control, and balance that defines the method. The body forms a V-shape while balancing on the tailbone, with arms extended parallel to legs at approximately 45 degrees.

Technical execution:

1. Start supine with arms overhead, legs extended
2. Simultaneously roll torso up while legs lift to 45 degrees
3. Create V-shape balancing on tailbone, arms reaching toward feet
4. Lower with control, returning to starting position

Teaser variations:

- **Teaser 1:** Basic V-position; arms lower and lift 3 times
- **Teaser 2:** Hold position; legs lower and lift 3 times
- **Teaser 3:** Everything lowers and lifts together 3 times
- **Teaser Prep:** Feet remain on floor, only torso curls up

- **Single Leg Teaser:** One leg bent, one extended

Apparatus variations: Teaser on Reformer Long Box (most challenging), Cadillac/Tower with push-through bar (assisted), Wunda Chair

The Teaser differs from yoga's Navasana (Boat Pose) through its emphasis on the C-curve in the lower spine rather than sitting upright on the sit bones.

Tendon Stretch

Category: Classical Reformer Exercise

An advanced Reformer exercise where the practitioner stands on the carriage with hands on the footbar, heels hanging off the edge, in an inverted pike position.

Technical execution:

1. Stand on carriage, hands on footbar, heels pressing down
2. Create deep pike with head hanging between arms, gazing through inner thighs
3. Press carriage out and return with control while maintaining position

Tendon Stretch provides a deep hamstring and Achilles stretch, nervous system stimulation via inversion, and develops the arm-to-torso connection. The exercise also appears in the Wunda Chair repertoire as a standing exercise.

The Hundred

Category: Classical Mat Exercise

Often the first exercise of the mat series, The Hundred builds core endurance and warms up the body. Named for the **100 breath counts** performed during execution.

Technical execution:

1. Lie supine, curl head and shoulders up, extend legs to 45 degrees
2. Arms reach alongside body, parallel to floor
3. Pump arms vigorously 6 inches up and down
4. Breathe: inhale for 5 counts, exhale for 5 counts (repeat 10 times = 100)

The Hundred targets transversus abdominis, rectus abdominis, and hip flexors while developing respiratory endurance. Modifications include keeping legs in tabletop or raising the leg angle.

Theraband

Category: Props/Accessories

A brand name (now used generically) for elastic resistance bands used to add resistance or assistance to Pilates exercises. Bands come in graduated resistance levels indicated by color—typically light (yellow) through heavy (black).

Common exercises with Theraband:

- Roll Up with band around feet (assists the movement)
 - Leg Circles with band for feedback
 - Chest Expansion
 - Shoulder strengthening exercises
 - Bridging with band around thighs (for hip abductor activation)
-

Thigh Stretch

Category: Classical Exercise

A kneeling exercise stretching the quadriceps and hip flexors while strengthening back, glutes, and abdominals. The practitioner kneels upright and hinges backward as a unit.

Technical execution:

1. Kneel with thighs vertical, holding straps (Reformer) or pole (Mat)
2. Hinge backward from knees as one unit, maintaining straight line from knees through head
3. Return to vertical with control

The advanced variation adds back extension after the hinge—the upper back arches before returning to vertical.

Thoracic Spine

Category: Anatomy

The middle section of the spine consisting of **12 vertebrae (T1-T12)**, located between the cervical (neck) and lumbar (lower back) regions. The thoracic spine is designed primarily for rotation and extension.

Thoracic mobility is a major Pilates focus. Exercises specifically targeting thoracic extension include Swan and Breaststroke; those targeting rotation include Spine Twist, Saw, and the various Twist exercises. Improved thoracic mobility reduces compensatory stress on the lumbar spine and neck—critical for individuals with sedentary lifestyles.

Tick Tock

Category: Classical Exercise Variation

A supine exercise where legs move side to side like a metronome while the upper body remains stable, also called "Straight Leg Knee Sways."

Technical execution:

1. Lie supine with legs extended toward ceiling (or tabletop for modification)
2. Lower legs together to one side
3. Return to center, then lower to other side
4. Keep opposite shoulder anchored throughout

Tick Tock targets the obliques and hip stabilizers while developing the ability to dissociate lower body movement from upper body stability.

Toe Corrector

Category: Equipment/Small Apparatus

A small spring-loaded device designed by Joseph Pilates to strengthen toe joints and help correct alignment issues, particularly bunions. The device features an elastic loop placed around the big toes of both feet with a central resistance mechanism.

Benefits:

- Strengthens toe joints
- Helps realign the big toe
- Reduces bunion discomfort
- Connects foot muscles to the kinetic chain through hips and glutes

- Improves proprioception in feet
-

Tower

Category: Equipment/Apparatus

Either a standalone apparatus or an attachment converting a Reformer into a "Reformer with Tower," providing Cadillac/Trapeze Table functionality in a smaller footprint.

Key components:

- Vertical rails
- Push-through bar with multiple height adjustments
- Roll-down bar
- Leg springs and arm springs
- Safety chain

The Tower offers roll-down/roll-up exercises, push-through bar work, leg spring series, and arm spring exercises—essentially a wall-mounted version of the Cadillac's key functions. It proves less intimidating than the full Cadillac and ideal for beginners due to the moderate range of motion protective for joints.

Tracking

Category: Cueing Language/Alignment

Refers to the alignment of joints during movement—particularly ensuring knees track over toes (second/third toe) during squats, lunges, and footwork. Proper tracking prevents knee injuries and ensures balanced muscle engagement.

Transversus Abdominis (TA)

Category: Anatomy

The deepest layer of abdominal muscles, running horizontally around the torso like a corset. The TA extends from the lower ribs to the pelvis, wrapping around to attach at the spine via the thoracolumbar fascia.

In Pilates, the transversus abdominis is considered the **most important core muscle**, providing:

- Spinal stabilization
- Internal organ compression and protection
- Pelvic floor support
- Foundation for all movement

Engagement cues:

- "Draw your navel to your spine"
 - "Zip up from your pubic bone to your navel"
 - "Imagine a corset tightening around your waist"
 - "Create a smile across your hip bones"
-

Trapeze Table (Cadillac)

Category: Equipment/Major Apparatus

The largest piece of Pilates equipment, featuring a raised bed with an overhead metal frame (canopy) equipped with bars, springs, straps, and a trapeze. Named "Cadillac" after the luxury car brand—representing "the best of everything."

Joseph Pilates developed this apparatus in the 1940s, reportedly inspired by hospital beds used to rehabilitate patients.

Key components:

- Padded table/bed raised off floor
- Metal canopy frame
- Push-through bar (3 or 4-sided attachment)
- Roll-down bar
- Trapeze with fuzzy straps
- Long and short springs
- Leg springs and arm springs
- Safety strap

The Cadillac offers over **200 exercises** across supine, prone, seated, and standing positions. Its height makes it accessible for elderly or injured practitioners, and the spring system provides both assistance and resistance.

Trapezius

Category: Anatomy

A large, diamond-shaped muscle extending from the base of the skull down to the mid-back and out to the shoulders. The trapezius divides into upper, middle, and lower fibers with different functions.

Common Pilates cues involving trapezius:

- "Shoulders away from ears" (releasing upper traps)
 - "Slide shoulder blades down your back" (engaging middle/lower traps)
 - "Open your chest" (involves trapezius stabilization)
-

Tree (Climb a Tree)

Category: Classical Exercise

An exercise where hands "walk" up and down one extended leg, resembling climbing a tree. Part of the Short Box Series on Reformer.

Technical execution (Reformer):

1. Sit on box, one foot under strap, other leg extended
2. Hands walk up the extended leg as torso curls back
3. Lower to supine position with control
4. Hands walk up leg to return to sitting

Tree develops abdominal strength, hip flexor engagement, and hamstring flexibility.

Tuck

Category: Cueing Language/Pelvic Position

A posterior pelvic tilt where the tailbone curls under and the lower back flattens against the mat. Used selectively in Pilates—neutral pelvis is generally preferred as the default position.

Appropriate uses:

- Bridge exercises (initiation phase)
 - Roll Up (during articulation)
 - Imprint position for those with lower back issues
 - Specific abdominal exercises requiring spinal flexion
-

Twist

Category: Movement Category/Exercises

Twist refers both to a category of rotational movements and specific exercises. The twist pattern requires one body portion to remain stable while another rotates.

Key twist exercises:

- **Twist on Short Box:** Upper body rotates while lower body stays anchored
- **Spine Twist:** Seated twist with straight legs
- **Saw:** Twist combined with forward flexion
- **Snake/Twist:** Advanced Reformer exercise combining plank with rotation
- **Corkscrew:** Lower body rotates while upper body stays stable

Twisting exercises exhale to facilitate the wringing action, rotate around the central axis, and require clear stabilization of the non-moving portion.

Two-Way Stretch

Category: Principle/Cueing Concept

A fundamental Pilates principle where energy extends simultaneously in opposite directions, creating length and opposition throughout the body.

Examples:

- Arms reaching one direction, legs the opposite (Teaser, Swimming)
 - Pushing down through feet while lifting through crown of head (Standing exercises)
 - Reaching through fingertips while reaching through tailbone (Swan)
-

U

Uniform Development

Category: Pilates Principle

One of Joseph Pilates' key principles: the entire body should develop evenly without overemphasizing any particular area. The goal is balanced muscle development and symmetry — front/back, left/right, upper/lower.

Pilates exercises work the body as an integrated unit, developing opposing muscle groups equally. This principle distinguishes Pilates from bodybuilding approaches that may create imbalances through isolated muscle training.

Universal Reformer

Category: Equipment/Historical Term

The original name Joseph Pilates gave to his Reformer apparatus, signifying its ability to "universally reform the body." Conceived around 1912 during Pilates' internment in England during WWI, the Universal Reformer evolved from attaching springs to hospital beds for patient rehabilitation.

Gratz Industries produced their first Universal Reformer in 1965 under the guidance of Joseph Pilates and Romana Kryzanowska, maintaining original specifications still available today.

Unweight

Category: Cueing Language

A cue instructing practitioners to reduce pressure or remove weight from a body part or apparatus, often used during transitions.

Examples:

- "Unweight your sit bones" (prepare to roll back)
 - "Unweight the carriage" (reduce spring pressure)
 - "Unweight your feet" (prepare to lift legs)
-

Up Stretch

Category: Classical Reformer Exercise

Part of the Long Stretch Series, Up Stretch positions the practitioner standing on the carriage with hands on the footbar in an inverted V/pike shape.

Technical execution:

1. Hands on footbar, feet on shoulder blocks, body in pike
2. Press carriage out while maintaining straight spine angle
3. Return with control

Variations:

- **Up Stretch 1:** Basic pike, carriage movement maintaining spine angle
- **Up Stretch 2:** Transition to plank (Long Stretch), pivot back to pike
- **Up Stretch 3:** Combines Up Stretch, Long Stretch, and Down Stretch
- **Up Stretch Combo:** Flows through multiple variations

The movement comes from the seat/lower body—arms are for balance. Related to Elephant and (conceptually) to The Hundred performed upside down.

V

V-Sit (V-Position)

Category: Exercise Position

An advanced core position where the body forms a "V" shape—legs and upper body simultaneously lifted while balancing on the sit bones/tailbone. Arms typically reach parallel to the floor or toward the feet.

The V-sit relates closely to Teaser but may be held as an isometric position or combined with arm pumping (as in Hundred variations). This position targets rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, obliques, and hip flexors while developing balance.

Vastus Muscles

Category: Anatomy

Three of the four quadriceps muscles: **vastus lateralis** (outer thigh), **vastus medialis** (inner thigh, including the important VMO), and **vastus intermedius** (deep center). These muscles work with the rectus femoris to extend the knee.

In Pilates, VMO (vastus medialis oblique) strengthening receives particular attention for knee stability. Exercises engaging the vastus muscles include Reformer Footwork, Leg Circles, Single Leg Stretch, and Wunda Chair Pumping.

Vertebrae/Vertebral Articulation

Category: Anatomy/Movement Principle

The individual bones of the spinal column. "Vertebral articulation" describes the sequential, controlled movement of each vertebra independently—the wave-like motion characteristic of Pilates spinal work.

Joseph Pilates believed "a man is only as young as his spinal column is flexible." Vertebral articulation develops segmental control, creates space between vertebrae, and promotes healthy disc function.

Spinal regions:

- **Cervical:** 7 vertebrae (C1-C7) in neck
- **Thoracic:** 12 vertebrae (T1-T12) in mid-back
- **Lumbar:** 5 vertebrae (L1-L5) in lower back
- **Sacrum:** Fused vertebrae at base
- **Coccyx:** Tailbone

Cueing: "Roll through your spine one vertebra at a time," "Peel your spine off the mat like peeling tape"

W

Wall Exercises (Wall Pilates)

Category: Exercise Category

Pilates exercises using a wall for support, feedback, and resistance. The wall provides stability and alignment cues while allowing practitioners to challenge balance and strength.

Key exercises:

- **Wall Roll Down:** Standing with back against wall, articulating spine as you roll forward

- **Wall Plank:** Push-up position with feet elevated on wall
- **Wall Swan:** Kneeling facing wall, extending spine while pressing into wall
- **Wall Squat:** Sliding down wall into seated position
- **Wall Push-Up:** Standing push-ups against wall (beginner modification)

Wall Pilates proves ideal for beginners learning alignment, provides proprioceptive feedback, and suits home practice without equipment.

Wall Unit (Wall Tower)

Category: Equipment/Apparatus

A wall-mounted apparatus providing Cadillac/Trapeze Table functionality in a space-efficient format. The unit anchors securely to wall and floor, featuring spring attachment points, push-through bar, and roll-down bar.

Key components:

- Stainless steel frame (typically 89 inches high)
- Push-through bar with multiple height adjustments
- Roll-down bar
- Spring attachment points (20+)
- Optional high mat with moon boxes

The Wall Unit allows roll-back exercises, push-through series, leg spring work, and standing exercises while preserving floor space that a full Cadillac would occupy.

Weighted Balls (Toning Balls)

Category: Props/Accessories

Small, handheld weighted balls (typically **1-8 pounds**) used to add resistance to mat exercises. Usually sand-filled with soft, grippy PVC exterior, these balls measure approximately 3.5 inches in diameter.

Applications:

- Add resistance to arm series
- Increase challenge in core exercises

- Activate smaller stabilizing muscles
- Create instability for deeper muscle engagement
- Alternative to dumbbells with reduced wrist strain

Exercises: The Hundred with arm weights, Chest Expansion, Side-lying arm circles, Russian twists

Weight Shift

Category: Cueing Language/Principle

The controlled transfer of body weight from one point to another during exercise—a fundamental aspect of balance training and functional movement.

Applications:

- Essential in standing exercises
- Key component of Wunda Chair work
- Used in walking variations and single-leg exercises
- Develops proprioception and balance

Cueing: "Shift your weight onto your right leg while maintaining pelvis stability"

Whole Body Integration

Category: Pilates Principle

The principle that exercises should engage the entire body as a connected unit rather than isolating individual muscles. Every movement originates from the center and flows outward through integrated muscular engagement.

This principle underlies all Pilates work—even exercises targeting specific areas maintain whole-body awareness and connection.

Wunda Chair (Low Chair)

Category: Equipment/Major Apparatus

A compact, versatile apparatus invented by Joseph Pilates, consisting of a padded seat and spring-loaded pedal providing resistance. Originally designed as convertible furniture for home use—allowing clients spending summers away from his studio to maintain their practice.

Historical note: 1930s advertisements show furniture called "Wunda Chair" that may have influenced Pilates' naming. His patent drawings reveal the original design had springs in both the back AND seat—features not present in modern reproductions.

Modern specifications:

- Spring-loaded pedal(s) attached to padded seat
- Split pedal option for unilateral work
- Springs with top and bottom attachment points for varying resistance
- Compact footprint ideal for home or small studio spaces

Classical exercise order:

1. Push Up (Bottom and Top)
2. Snake Twist/Teaser Twist
3. Tendon Stretch (Front, Side, Back, Combo)
4. Mountain Climb (Up, Side, Down)
5. Pull Up
6. Footwork/Pumping series

Key exercises:

- **Pumping:** Seated pedal press for leg strength and posture
- **Tendon Stretch:** Standing on chair pressing pedal, challenging hamstrings and Achilles
- **Mountain Climb:** Standing on pedal, climbing toward top
- **Going Up Front/Side:** Step-up variations
- **Swan:** Extension with torso draped over seat
- **Horseback:** Seated balance challenge

The Wunda Chair excels at building hip, thigh, glute, and core strength while developing balance—the moving pedal creates continuous stability challenges.

X

X-Position

Category: Exercise Position

A body position with arms and legs extended diagonally from the torso, forming an "X" shape. Used in various mat exercises challenging core stability while limbs move through space.

Key exercises:

- **Starfish/Dead Bug Variations:** Supine with opposite arm and leg extended
- **X-Stretch:** Prone or supine with all limbs extended diagonally

This position challenges anti-rotation stability and develops cross-body coordination.

Y

Yoga Blocks (in Pilates)

Category: Props/Accessories

Foam or cork blocks traditionally from yoga, increasingly incorporated into Pilates for support, challenge, and alignment feedback.

Applications in Pilates:

- **Support:** Under hands in Roll Up for accessibility, under pelvis for elevation, under head for alignment
 - **Challenge:** Between thighs for inner thigh activation, standing balance on blocks, added height in plank variations
 - **Feedback:** Between knees to maintain parallel alignment, against wall for spine awareness
-

Your Health

Category: Historical Publication

Joseph Pilates' first published book, released in **1934**. Full title: "Your Health: A Corrective System of Exercising That Revolutionizes the Entire Field of Physical Education."

Contents:

- Early 20th-century philosophies on health and fitness
- Based on balanced body and mind (drawing from ancient Greek ideals)
- First written explanation of "Contrology"
- Fundamental tenets of posture, body mechanics, and correct breathing
- His "law of natural exercises"
- Observations about modern lifestyle's impact on health

Written while Pilates taught at 939 8th Avenue in New York City, this book preceded "Return to Life Through Contrology" by 11 years. It documents his studies of yoga, Zen, and ancient exercise systems, as well as his experiences teaching at the WWI internment camp in England.

Availability: Republished editions available; original copies are rare collector's items.

Z

Zipper/Zippering

Category: Cueing Language

A visualization cue instructing practitioners to draw abdominal muscles inward and upward—as if zipping up tight-fitting pants from pubic bone to navel. This imagery activates the **transversus abdominis** and pelvic floor, creating the foundational core engagement for all Pilates movement.

Cueing examples:

- "Zip up from your pubic bone to your belly button"
- "Imagine zipping into tight jeans"
- "Draw your two hip bones together as if closing a zipper"

Related cues: "Navel to spine," "Scoop your abs," "Button up," "Corset your waist"

The zipper cue helps practitioners understand that core engagement involves drawing inward and upward—not bearing down or pushing out.

Zoning

Category: Cueing Language/Technique

The practice of focusing intently on a particular muscle group or body region during exercises to ensure proper engagement and alignment. Zoning enhances mind-body connection and promotes more effective workouts through targeted focus.

Application: "Zone into your obliques" during Side Plank; "Zone into your inner thighs" during Leg Circles

Quick Reference: Complete Q-Z Index

Q: Quadruped • Quadratus Lumborum • Quadriceps

R: Reach • Rectus Abdominis • Reformer • Resistance Bands • Retraction • Return to Life Through Contrology • Rhomboids • Ribs to Hips • Rocking • Roll Back Bar • Roll Down • Roll Over • Roll Up • Rolling Like a Ball • Roller • Romana Kryzanowska • Romana's Pilates • Ron Fletcher • Rotator Cuff • Rowing Series

S: Sacrum • Saw • Scissors • Scoop • Seal • Serratus Anterior • Short Box Series • Short Spine • Shoulder Bridge • Shoulder Blocks • Side Bend • Side Kick Series • Single Leg Stretch • Six Principles • Snake • Spine Corrector • Spine Stretch • Spine Twist • Springs • Stability Ball • STOTT Pilates • Straps • Supine • Swan • Swimming

T: Tabletop • Tailbone • Teaser • Tendon Stretch • The Hundred • Theraband • Thigh Stretch • Thoracic Spine • Tick Tock • Toe Corrector • Tower • Tracking • Transversus Abdominis • Trapeze Table • Trapezius • Tree • Tuck • Twist • Two-Way Stretch

U: Uniform Development • Universal Reformer • Unweight • Up Stretch

V: V-Sit • Vastus Muscles • Vertebrae

W: Wall Exercises • Wall Unit • Weighted Balls • Weight Shift • Whole Body Integration • Wunda Chair

X: X-Position

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