

The Definitive Pilates Encyclopedia: A through H

This comprehensive reference documents every term a Pilates practitioner, instructor, or student may encounter—from foundational exercises like **The Hundred** to specialized apparatus like the **Guillotine Tower**, from anatomical terminology to the historical figures who shaped this movement discipline. The encyclopedia covers exercises, equipment, anatomical terms, Joseph Pilates' original Contrology concepts, cueing language, certification bodies, and the first-generation teachers who preserved this method.

A

Ab Prep (Abdominal Preparation)

A foundational Pilates mat exercise performed supine with knees bent, curling the head and upper trunk off the mat while engaging the abdominals and maintaining a neutral lower back. This contemporary addition—not among Joseph Pilates' original 34 exercises—serves as essential preparation for more demanding work like The Hundred. Instructors use Ab Prep to teach proper abdominal engagement and the connection between breath and movement. Variations include Baby Ab Prep (head remains down) and Ab Prep with arms extended overhead.

Ab Series (Abdominal Series / Series of Five)

A sequence of five consecutive mat exercises targeting the abdominal muscles: Single Leg Stretch, Double Leg Stretch, Single Straight Leg Stretch (Scissors), Double Straight Leg Stretch (Lower/Lift), and Criss-Cross. Performed without rest between exercises, this series builds core endurance, strength, and coordination. First-generation teachers expanded on Joseph Pilates' original Single and Double Leg Stretch to create this centerpiece of classical mat work. Also called the "Stomach Series."

Abdominals (Abs)

The four muscle groups supporting and stabilizing the trunk: **rectus abdominis** (the "six-pack" muscle running vertically), **external obliques** (outer layer, diagonal fibers), **internal obliques** (deeper layer, opposite diagonal), and **transversus abdominis** (deepest layer, horizontal fibers). These muscles assist in spinal flexion, extension, rotation, and lateral flexion. The abdominals form the primary component of the Powerhouse, engaged in virtually every Pilates exercise.

Abduction

Movement of a limb or body part away from the midline. Examples include raising arms to a "T" position or lifting the leg sideways in side-lying work. Understanding abduction helps practitioners execute exercises like Side Kick series correctly and comprehend scapular mechanics during arm work.

ACE (American Council on Exercise)

A major fitness certification organization that recognizes Pilates certifications and provides continuing education credits (CECs/CEUs) for instructors. ACE accreditation indicates professional credibility within the broader fitness industry.

Activation

The deliberate engagement of specific muscles before or during movement. Proper muscle activation—particularly core and gluteal activation—is fundamental to correct Pilates technique. Instructors cue practitioners to "activate" target muscle groups before initiating exercises.

Active Stretch

Stretching performed using the body's own muscular engagement to create and hold a position, contrasted with passive stretching where external force creates the stretch. Many Pilates exercises combine active and passive elements, developing both strength and flexibility simultaneously.

Adduction

Movement of a limb toward the midline—the opposite of abduction. A helpful mnemonic: "adding" limbs together. Adduction features prominently in Magic Circle exercises, inner thigh work, and the return phase of many arm movements.

Adductors

The muscles of the inner thigh—including adductor longus, brevis, and magnus—responsible for drawing the legs toward the midline. These muscles work intensively during Magic Circle exercises, Reformer leg spring work, and exercises requiring the legs to squeeze together.

Advanced Level

The highest difficulty classification in Pilates, featuring exercises requiring significant strength, flexibility, coordination, and body awareness. Advanced exercises include Boomerang, Control Balance, Snake/Twist, and Star. Progression to advanced work requires mastery of fundamental and intermediate repertoire.

Alignment

The optimal positioning of body parts in relation to each other and gravity—head stacked over shoulders, ribcage over pelvis, weight distributed evenly. Proper alignment ensures efficient movement, correct muscle engagement, and injury prevention. Instructors constantly cue for alignment throughout practice, referencing concepts like neutral spine and the "box" of shoulders and hips.

Anchor

A cueing term for stabilizing one body part to allow another to move freely and with control. Common

applications include "anchor your shoulders to the mat" during Single Leg Stretch or "anchor your pelvis" during leg circles. This stabilization concept ensures controlled, isolated movement.

Anterior

Anatomical directional term indicating position toward the front of the body. Understanding anterior versus posterior helps practitioners interpret cues like "anterior pelvic tilt" (pelvis tipped forward).

Apparatus

The collective term for Pilates equipment designed by Joseph Pilates, including the Reformer, Cadillac (Trapeze Table), Wunda Chair, Ladder Barrel, Spine Corrector, Ped-o-Pul, and specialized pieces like the Guillotine Tower. Distinguished from "props" (smaller accessories like balls and bands), apparatus work forms the foundation of studio-based Pilates.

APPI (Australian Physiotherapy & Pilates Institute)

An international Pilates education organization offering certified matwork and equipment instructor training with emphasis on physiotherapy-based principles. Popular in the UK, Australia, and throughout the international Pilates community.

Arabesque

A ballet-derived position adapted for Pilates stability and balance work. One leg lifts behind the body while the standing leg maintains alignment and the core remains engaged. Performed on the Chair, Reformer, and mat, Arabesque challenges proprioception and hip extension while requiring precise trunk stability.

Arc Barrel

A smaller, versatile barrel variation designed to support the spine's natural curves. Featuring a curved, padded surface—sometimes with a wedge-shaped portion—the Arc Barrel improves posture, spinal flexibility, and core strength. Related equipment includes the Spine Corrector and Small Barrel.

Arch

Refers to both the natural curve of the foot and spinal extension (backbend). Maintaining natural foot arches is essential for proper lower body alignment; spinal arch work appears in exercises like Swan. The Foot Corrector apparatus specifically addresses arch development.

Arm Chair

A traditional Pilates apparatus featuring handles with resistance springs extending from the sides, without the pedal found on Wunda or High Chairs. Designed by Joseph Pilates for scapular stability and upper body work, this piece excels for shoulder rehabilitation and arm strengthening through core connection.

Arm Circles

Circular movements of the arms—with or without resistance—designed to mobilize shoulder joints and strengthen the shoulder girdle while maintaining core stability. Variations range from small warm-up circles to large sweeping movements on the Cadillac or with the Magic Circle.

Arm Springs

Springs attached to the Cadillac or Wall Tower connecting to handles or straps for upper body exercises. These provide variable resistance for arm strengthening, shoulder stability, and mobility work including Arm Circles, Chest Expansion, and the Arm Series.

Arm Weights Series (Standing Arm Weights)

A classical Pilates series performed standing with light weights (typically 1-3 pounds), focusing on postural alignment while moving arms through various patterns. Exercises include Chest Expansion, Boxing, The Bug, and Arm Circles. This series improves posture, shoulder stability, and challenges standing balance.

Articulation

The sequential, controlled movement of the spine where each vertebra moves independently. This principle emphasizes fluidity and precision in spinal movements, appearing in exercises like Roll Up, Spine Curl, and Bridging. Spinal articulation is fundamental to healthy movement and a cornerstone of Pilates technique.

Assisted Stretch

Any stretch supported by Pilates equipment or a partner to facilitate deeper stretching. The Reformer's straps and Cadillac's bars provide leverage for assisted hamstring, hip flexor, and spinal stretches that may be difficult to achieve independently.

Axial Elongation

Lengthening the spine along its vertical axis, creating space between vertebrae. Often cued as "grow taller," "lengthen through the crown of your head," or "create space between your vertebrae." This concept applies to seated, standing, and prone exercises.

B

Baby Chair

A smaller version of the Pilates chair designed for compact spaces or smaller-framed practitioners. Functions identically to the Wunda Chair but with reduced dimensions.

Balance

A foundational Pilates principle extending beyond simply not falling—it encompasses maintaining control, proper form, and equilibrium throughout movements. All Pilates exercises challenge and improve balance through core engagement and proprioceptive training. Joseph Pilates emphasized developing balanced strength throughout the body.

Balance Control (Control Balance)

An advanced mat exercise testing full-body strength and coordination. From supine, the practitioner rolls over into a shoulder stand position, then extends one leg toward the ceiling while pressing the other foot into the hands. This exercise demonstrates complete body mastery and appears near the end of the classical mat order.

Balanced Body

A major Pilates equipment manufacturer and education organization headquartered in Sacramento, California. Beyond producing Reformers, Cadillacs, Chairs, and accessories, Balanced Body offers comprehensive teacher training programs. Their Movement Principles programming system influences contemporary Pilates instruction worldwide.

Balls (Pilates Balls)

Various inflatable balls used in Pilates practice: **stability balls** (large Swiss balls for balance challenges), **Overballs** (small, slightly deflated balls), **soft balls** for tactile feedback, and **weighted balls** for resistance. These contemporary props enhance core engagement, provide proprioceptive feedback, and add variety to mat work.

Bands (Resistance Bands / Pilates Bands)

Elastic bands of varying lengths and resistance levels adding challenge or assistance to exercises. While not part of Joseph Pilates' original repertoire, bands have become standard props for enhanced mat work, stretching, and portable practice. Also called Therabands or Flex-Bands.

Barrel

A generic term for curved, padded Pilates apparatus supporting the spine during exercises. The barrel family includes the **Ladder Barrel** (largest, with ladder rungs), **Spine Corrector** (wave-shaped), **Arc Barrel** (smallest), and variations. Joseph Pilates designed barrels to improve spinal flexibility, expand breathing capacity, and strengthen the core.

BASI Pilates (Body Arts and Science International)

One of the most prestigious international Pilates education organizations, established in 1989 by Rael Isacowitz. BASI offers comprehensive teacher training covering Mat, Reformer, Cadillac, Wunda Chair, Ladder Barrel, Spine Corrector, Ped-o-Pul, and auxiliary apparatus. Known for academic rigor and fidelity to Joseph Pilates' work while integrating contemporary movement science.

Before the Hundred

A preparatory program created by Pilates Elder Kathy Grant helping clients develop body awareness and strength before beginning traditional Pilates exercises. This approach recognizes that some practitioners need preliminary conditioning before tackling the classical repertoire.

Beginner Level

The entry classification for new Pilates practitioners, featuring exercises with fewer moving joints, shorter levers, and more support. Beginner work focuses on learning foundational principles, developing body awareness, and establishing correct movement patterns before progressing.

Belly Button to Spine (Navel to Spine)

A cueing phrase instructing practitioners to draw the belly button toward the spine, contracting the deep abdominals—particularly transversus abdominis—to stabilize the core. This fundamental cue appears throughout Pilates practice. Related terms include "scoop," "hollowing," and "zip up."

Bicycle

An advanced mat exercise performed supine with legs lifted, alternating a cycling motion while maintaining stable hips and core. Part of Joseph Pilates' original repertoire from *Return to Life Through Contrology*, the Bicycle appears on mat, Reformer, and Cadillac. It develops hip flexibility, abdominal strength, and coordination.

Biceps

The two-headed muscle at the front of the upper arm responsible for elbow flexion and forearm supination. Engaged during pulling exercises, Arm Springs work, and rowing movements on the Reformer.

Boomerang

An advanced mat exercise (Position 29 of 34 in classical order) combining elements of Teaser, Roll Over, and Open Leg Rocker. [Pilateslessonplans](#) The practitioner sits with crossed ankles, rolls over, switches the leg cross, returns to Teaser position, then stretches forward with arms reaching back. This challenging exercise massages the spine and demands full-body coordination.

BOSU (Both Sides Up)

A dome-shaped balance trainer with a flat platform on one side and inflatable dome on the other. While not original Pilates equipment, the BOSU challenges balance and stability when incorporated into contemporary Pilates exercises.

Box (Anatomical Reference)

The torso area framed by the shoulders and hips—specifically the space between the line across the collarbones

and the line across the hip bones. Maintaining a "level box" or "square box" ensures proper postural alignment. Instructors cue "keep your box square" to prevent rotation or tilting of the trunk.

Box (Reformer Accessory)

A padded rectangular prop used on the Reformer to elevate the torso or pelvis. Positioned lengthwise for "Long Box Series" (back extension, arm work) or widthwise for "Short Box Series" (core work, spinal articulation). The Moon Box is a half-moon shaped variation.

Bracing

Creating tension throughout the core musculature to stabilize the spine before movement. Unlike "hollowing" (drawing in), bracing engages all layers of abdominal muscles for maximum stability during loaded movements and challenging exercises.

Breast Stroke (Breaststroke)

A prone exercise mimicking swimming breaststroke movements, extending the spine while coordinating arm patterns. This exercise strengthens back extensors and shoulder stabilizers while improving coordination.

Breath / Breathing

A foundational Pilates principle. Joseph Pilates believed proper breathing is essential for life and movement, stating: "Above all, learn how to breathe correctly." Pilates breathing emphasizes full inhalation through the nose and complete exhalation through pursed lips, coordinated with movement. The breath activates deep core muscles and facilitates spinal movement.

Bridging (Bridge / Shoulder Bridge)

A fundamental exercise performed supine with knees bent, lifting the pelvis and spine sequentially off the mat to create a bridge shape. This movement teaches spinal articulation, strengthens glutes and hamstrings, and develops core stability. Variations include Shoulder Bridge with leg extension and single-leg variations.

Blossom Leilani Crawford

A second-generation teacher who worked with Pilates Elder Kathy Grant for seventeen years. Owner of Bridge Pilates in Brooklyn, New York, Crawford carries forward Grant's distinctive lineage and methodology.

Brooke Siler

A prominent Pilates teacher trained through Romana Kryzanowska's lineage, owner of re:AB Pilates studio, and author of *The Pilates Body*—an influential book introducing Pilates to mainstream audiences.

Bug (The Bug)

An exercise from the Standing Arm Weights series where small weights circle outward from the thighs, progressively moving higher until overhead, then reversing the pattern. (WebMD) Develops shoulder mobility

and arm strength while challenging postural control.

Button-Up

A cueing term instructing practitioners to draw the ribs in and down, as if buttoning a vest that's too small. This prevents rib flare and maintains proper rib cage alignment relative to the pelvis.

C

C-Curve (C-Shape)

The shape of the spine when in a flexed (rounded forward) position, resembling the letter "C." This even, controlled rounding of the entire spine—from tailbone through neck—is foundational to exercises like Roll Up, Rolling Like a Ball, and Teaser. The C-Curve simultaneously strengthens abdominals while stretching the lower back.

Cadillac (Trapeze Table)

A large Pilates apparatus consisting of a raised horizontal table with a frame above it, featuring bars, springs, straps, and a Push-Through Bar. Joseph Pilates developed this as his first apparatus during WWI, attaching springs to hospital beds to rehabilitate injured prisoners. Named after the luxury car brand due to its versatility, the Cadillac allows exercises in multiple positions and provides support for those unable to work on the mat. The Wall Tower is a space-saving wall-mounted version.

Cardio Pilates

A contemporary class format combining traditional Pilates movements with higher-intensity intervals to elevate heart rate while maintaining Pilates principles. This evolution meets demand for cardiovascular conditioning within the Pilates framework.

Carola Trier (1913-2000)

A first-generation Pilates teacher and Pilates Elder. Born in Frankfurt, Germany, Trier was a dancer, acrobat, and roller-skating contortionist who survived internment at Gurs concentration camp during WWII. She came to Joseph Pilates in 1950 after a knee injury and trained throughout the 1950s. In 1960, she became the first person to open a Pilates studio with Joseph and Clara Pilates' blessing. Her studio at 200 West 58th Street trained many influential second-generation teachers including Kathy Grant, Alan Herdman, Deborah Lessen, and Jillian Hessel.

Carriage

The moving platform on a Pilates Reformer that glides back and forth on rails, connected to springs providing resistance. The practitioner lies, sits, kneels, or stands on the carriage while performing exercises.

Cat Curl (Cat-Cow)

A quadruped exercise alternating between spinal flexion (C-curve/cat) and extension (cow), coordinated with breath. While adapted from various movement traditions, this exercise has become standard Pilates warm-up for mobilizing the spine and connecting breath to movement.

Centering

One of the six foundational Pilates principles—bringing focus to the center of the body (the Powerhouse) from which all movement initiates. Every Pilates exercise begins with centering: physically engaging the core and mentally focusing inward before moving.

Cervical Spine

The seven vertebrae (C1-C7) of the neck, the most mobile section of the spine. Proper cervical alignment is crucial in Pilates, especially during exercises like The Hundred or Roll-Up where the head lifts. Instructors cue "chin nod" to protect the cervical spine during flexion exercises.

Chair (Wunda Chair)

A compact Pilates apparatus consisting of a padded seat with a spring-loaded pedal, invented by Joseph Pilates in 1945 as the first functional home-gym equipment—designed to convert into a regular chair when not in use. "Wunda" was a marketing term for "wonder." The Chair challenges balance and stability while building strength, particularly in lower body and core work. Related apparatus include the Combo Chair (split pedal) and High Chair (with back support).

Chest Expansion

An exercise performed kneeling or standing, pressing arms down and back against spring resistance while opening the chest and turning the head side to side. This classical exercise using the Rollback Bar on the Cadillac (or performed standing on the Ped-o-Pul) strengthens back extensors and improves posture.

Chi Balls

Soft, inflatable balls of various sizes (typically 6-10 inches) used for self-massage, core activation, balance challenges, and proprioceptive feedback. A contemporary addition to Pilates props.

Chin Nod (Chin Tuck)

The gesture of slightly nodding the chin toward the throat to elongate the cervical spine, initiating the head lift in supine exercises. This essential preparation protects the neck during The Hundred, Roll Up, and all exercises requiring head and shoulder curl.

Circle (Magic Circle / Pilates Ring)

A flexible ring approximately 13-15 inches in diameter, usually made of rubber or metal with padded handles on

opposite sides. Reportedly invented by Joseph Pilates—possibly fashioned from a beer keg ring—the Circle provides resistance for inner and outer thigh work, arm exercises, and enhanced core engagement.

Circles (Leg Circles / Arm Circles)

A family of exercises involving circular limb movements while stabilizing the core. Single Leg Circle is #5 in the original 34 mat exercises. These movements develop hip mobility, core stability, and the ability to move limbs independently from the trunk.

Clam (Clamshell)

A side-lying exercise where knees open and close like a clamshell while feet remain together, targeting hip external rotators and gluteus medius. While a contemporary addition commonly used in rehabilitation, the Clam has become standard Pilates programming for addressing hip and knee issues.

Clara Pilates (née Zeuner)

Joseph Pilates' wife and teaching partner who helped develop and teach the method. Born in 1883, she married Joseph in 1928, and together they operated the original Pilates studio on 8th Avenue in New York City. After Joseph's death in 1967, Clara continued teaching until her own death in 1977, instrumental in training first-generation teachers and preserving the method.

Classical Pilates

An approach adhering closely to Joseph Pilates' original exercises, sequence, and principles. Maintained by first-generation teachers (Elders) who trained directly with Joseph and Clara, classical Pilates follows specific exercise orders on Mat and equipment. Distinguished from Contemporary Pilates, which integrates modern exercise science and may modify sequences.

Climbing the Tree

A seated exercise where hands "climb" up an extended leg—as if climbing a tree trunk—promoting hamstring flexibility and spinal articulation while maintaining core control. This classical exercise appears on mat, Reformer, and Cadillac.

Coccyx (Tailbone)

The lowest segment of the vertebral column, formed by 3-5 fused vertebrae. A reference point for pelvic positioning; practitioners often receive cues to "lengthen the tailbone" or "point the tailbone down" to maintain neutral spine.

Clavicle (Collarbone)

The S-shaped bone connecting the shoulder blade (scapula) to the sternum, part of the shoulder girdle. Proper clavicle alignment—"wide collarbones"—indicates correct shoulder positioning in Pilates exercises.

Combo Chair (Combination Chair)

A modern adaptation of the Wunda Chair featuring a split pedal allowing independent movement of each side, plus additional features like handles. This design enables unilateral work and greater exercise variety.

Concentration

One of the six foundational Pilates principles—focusing the mind intently on the movements being practiced. Joseph Pilates emphasized: "Concentrate on the correct movement each time you exercise, lest you do them improperly." The quality of execution matters more than quantity; Pilates requires full mental attention throughout practice.

Concentric Contraction

A muscle contraction where the muscle shortens while generating force—the "lifting" or "effort" phase of an exercise. Understanding concentric versus eccentric phases helps practitioners control both directions of each movement.

Contemporary Pilates

An approach integrating classical Pilates with modern exercise science, biomechanics, and rehabilitation principles. Contemporary styles—including STOTT Pilates and BASI Pilates—may modify exercises for individual needs, incorporate props like stability balls and foam rollers, and adjust sequences based on current anatomical knowledge.

Contraction

The tightening or engagement of muscles to perform movement. Instructors cue practitioners to "contract" specific muscle groups—such as contracting the abdominals or engaging the glutes—to achieve proper form.

Contrology

The original name Joseph Pilates gave his method, emphasizing complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit through conscious control of all muscular movements. The term appears throughout his writings, particularly *Return to Life Through Contrology* (1945). This foundational philosophy underlies all Pilates practice—the mind consciously controls the body to build physical and mental fitness.

Control

One of the six foundational Pilates principles—performing movements with complete muscular control, nothing haphazard. The very name "Contrology" derives from this principle. Every Pilates movement should be controlled from initiation through completion; momentum-based movements are avoided.

Control Balance

See *Balance Control*.

Coordination

A Reformer exercise performed supine with straps, where arms and legs extend simultaneously, then legs open/close and bend, requiring precise timing and breath coordination. This classical exercise develops the coordination between upper and lower body, core stability, and movement timing.

Core

The muscles of the mid-region including abdominals (rectus abdominis, transversus abdominis, obliques), back extensors, pelvic floor, and diaphragm. While Joseph Pilates used "Powerhouse," "core" is the contemporary term for this same musculature—the foundation from which all Pilates movement initiates and stabilizes.

Corkscrew

A classical mat exercise (#10 in the original 34) using core control to lift legs and move them in a controlled circular motion while lying supine. The exercise involves rolling up into a shoulder stand position, then circling the legs from side to side while rolling the pelvis. Joseph Pilates stated it "strengthens the shoulders and massages the internal organs."

Crab

An advanced rolling exercise performed seated, rolling backward and forward while switching the crossing of the legs and bringing the forehead toward the mat. Part of Joseph Pilates' original 34 exercises, the Crab challenges balance, spinal flexibility, and coordination while providing a deep hip flexor stretch.

Criss-Cross

The final exercise of the Ab Series targeting the oblique muscles. Performed supine with hands behind head, alternating bringing opposite elbow toward opposite knee while extending the other leg, creating a twisting motion. This exercise strengthens obliques, rectus abdominis, and hip flexors while improving torso rotation.

D

Deborah Lessen

A second-generation Pilates teacher trained by Carola Trier who became a prominent instructor, author, and preservationist of classical technique. Her contributions to Pilates education continue to influence the field.

Decomposition

Breaking down complex movements into simpler component parts for learning before integrating them into the full exercise. This teaching methodology helps beginners master challenging exercises by understanding each element before combining them.

Deep Core

The trio of deep stabilizing muscles—transversus abdominis, multifidus, and pelvic floor—that work together to support the spine. These muscles are targeted first in Pilates to provide spinal stability before larger movements. Also called the "T-Zone."

Deltoids

The triangular shoulder muscles covering the shoulder joint, responsible for arm abduction, flexion, and extension. Engaged in many Pilates upper body exercises including arm series, push-ups, planks, and Long Stretch Series.

Demi-Plié

A half bend of the knees while maintaining proper spinal alignment and core engagement—borrowed from ballet terminology. Used in standing footwork, Reformer exercises, and lower body work, reflecting Joseph Pilates' connection to the dance community.

Diaphragm

The dome-shaped muscle separating the thoracic and abdominal cavities; the primary muscle of respiration. It contracts downward during inhalation and relaxes upward during exhalation. Understanding diaphragmatic function is essential for Pilates breathing techniques; the diaphragm is considered part of the core musculature.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

A breathing technique emphasizing the descent of the diaphragm during inhalation, allowing the belly to expand. While valuable for relaxation, Pilates practitioners typically use lateral (thoracic) breathing during exercises to maintain abdominal engagement.

Diamond Position (Butterfly)

A seated position with soles of feet together and knees falling out to the sides, creating a diamond shape with the legs. Used for hip-opening stretches and as a starting position for certain exercises.

Disassociation

The ability to move one body part independently of another—such as circling the legs while keeping the pelvis stable. Essential for exercises like Leg Circles where limbs move independently from the trunk.

Diving (Swan Dive)

An advanced back extension exercise where the body rocks forward and back in a prone position, arms extended forward, creating a dynamic diving/rocking motion. A more advanced version of Swan, this exercise strengthens back extensors and develops dynamic spinal control.

Dog (Downward Dog / Up Stretch)

An inverted V-position with hands and feet on the floor, hips lifted high. Similar to yoga's Downward-Facing Dog; in Pilates, this position appears in exercises like Up Stretch on the Reformer. Stretches hamstrings and calves while strengthening shoulders and lengthening the spine.

Doming (of Abdomen)

An undesirable bulging of the abdominal wall outward during exertion, indicating poor transversus abdominis engagement. Instructors cue to prevent doming by ensuring proper deep core activation before and during exercises.

Donkey Kick

A quadruped exercise where one bent leg lifts and presses toward the ceiling—like a donkey kicking—targeting glutes and hamstrings. A contemporary addition strengthening gluteus maximus while maintaining core and pelvic stability.

Dorsiflexion

Flexing the foot upward, bringing toes toward the shin—the opposite of plantar flexion (pointing). Understanding dorsiflexion helps practitioners respond to cueing about "flexed foot" positions and develop ankle mobility.

Double Leg Kick (Double Kick)

A prone exercise (#14 in original order) where both heels kick toward the buttocks three times, then legs extend as the upper body lifts into back extension with arms reaching back. This classical exercise strengthens back extensors and hamstrings while opening the chest and shoulders.

Double Leg Stretch

A supine exercise where arms and legs simultaneously extend away from the body, then arms circle as knees draw back to chest. Part of the Ab Series, this classical exercise—called "Double Leg Pull" by Joseph Pilates—strengthens the core while challenging coordination and breath control.

Double Leg Lower (Double Leg Lift)

A supine exercise where both legs lower toward the floor from a 90-degree position while maintaining lumbar stability, then lift back up. This contemporary exercise challenges deep core stability and appears in both mat and Reformer Feet in Straps series.

Dowel (Pole)

A wooden or metal stick used for alignment feedback, arm exercises, and spinal mobility work. Provides proprioceptive information about spinal alignment during standing and mat exercises.

Downward Rotation (of Shoulder Blade)

Scapular rotation in which the inferior angle moves toward the spine; occurs when lowering the arm from overhead. Understanding scapular mechanics improves shoulder alignment and prevents injury.

Drawing In (Draw In)

Pulling the abdominal muscles inward toward the spine to engage the transversus abdominis and support the lower back. This foundational cue—derived from Joseph Pilates' emphasis on "scooping"—appears throughout Pilates practice. Related terms include "navel to spine" and "zip up."

Dumbbell

Small handheld weights used to add resistance to arm exercises and challenge core stability. Joseph Pilates included arm weight work in his original repertoire; the Standing Arm Weights Series uses light dumbbells (1-3 pounds).

Dynamic Pilates

A faster-paced, more challenging form of Pilates—often performed on the Reformer—combining strength training with cardio elements. This contemporary evolution targets fitness-oriented practitioners seeking more athletic workouts.

E

Eccentric Muscle Contraction

A muscle contraction where the muscle lengthens while under tension—controlling a movement against gravity or resistance. Fundamental to Pilates' emphasis on control during the lowering phase, such as rolling down vertebra-by-vertebra during Roll Up or controlling spring return on the Reformer.

Elders (First-Generation Teachers)

The small core of instructors who studied directly with Joseph and Clara Pilates, preserving and transmitting the method after Joseph's death in 1967. Key Elders include **Romana Kryzanowska, Ron Fletcher, Eve Gentry, Carola Trier, Kathy Grant, Lolita San Miguel, Mary Bowen, Jay Grimes, Bob Fitzgerald, and Bob Seed.** These teachers represent the direct lineage to Joseph Pilates.

Electric Chair

See *High Chair*.

Elephant

A fundamental Reformer exercise performed standing with hands on the footbar and feet on the carriage in an

inverted V position. The movement involves pushing the carriage back and drawing it in using core strength while maintaining a rounded spine. Part of the Long Stretch Series, Elephant teaches two-way stretch and core connection. Variations include Round Back Elephant, Flat Back Elephant, Single Leg Elephant, and Reverse Elephant.

Elongate

A cueing instruction to lengthen the spine or body parts in two opposing directions, creating space between vertebrae and joints. Common cue: "Elongate from the crown of your head to your tailbone."

Engage

An instruction to activate or contract specific muscles consciously—particularly the core/powerhouse—to create stability and support for movement. Examples: "Engage your abdominals," "Engage your glutes."

Energy (or Efficiency)

A contemporary addition to Pilates principles emphasizing performing movements with optimal effort—not too much, not too little—using only the muscles necessary for each action.

Equilibrium

The state of balance between both sides of the body, front to back, and between stability and mobility. Pilates exercises aim to restore equilibrium by addressing muscular imbalances.

Equipment

See *Apparatus*.

Erector Spinae

A group of muscles running along the length of the spine from sacrum to skull, comprising three columns: spinalis (medial), longissimus (middle), and iliocostalis (lateral). Critical for spinal extension exercises like Swan and Swimming, maintaining posture, and stabilizing the spine. Bilateral contraction extends the spine; unilateral contraction causes lateral flexion.

Eve Gentry (1909-1994)

A first-generation Pilates teacher and Pilates Elder. Born Henrietta Greenhood, she was a modern dancer with the Hanya Holm Company who studied with Joseph Pilates from 1938-1968. After a radical mastectomy in 1955, Joseph Pilates helped her rehabilitate—she regained full arm mobility within one year, demonstrating the method's therapeutic potential. Gentry co-founded the Institute for the Pilates Method in Santa Fe (1991) and developed "Mini-Moves" that became the foundation of Pilates Fundamentals. Her therapeutic approach, known as "Gentry Work," influenced how Pilates is applied in rehabilitation settings.

Eve's Lunge

A deep hip flexor stretch named after Eve Gentry, performed on the Reformer with one foot on the floor beside the machine and the other knee pressing into the shoulder rest. The practitioner lowers the hips to stretch the front of the hip joint. This exercise opens hip flexors, improves sacroiliac joint function, and serves as an alternative to Front Splits for practitioners with knee issues.

EXO Chair

A modern variation of the Wunda Chair—the name referencing external oblique focus—with design features optimizing standing and seated exercises.

Exhale

Breathing out, typically through pursed lips in Pilates. Often cued during the exertion phase to engage deep core muscles and facilitate movement: "Exhale as you curl up."

Extension

A straightening movement that increases the angle between two bones or body segments. In spinal terms, extension refers to arching or moving backward—the opposite of flexion. Fundamental to exercises like Swan, Swimming, and all back extension work.

Extensors

Muscles that extend or straighten joints. In Pilates, commonly references hip extensors (glutes, hamstrings), knee extensors (quadriceps), and spinal extensors (erector spinae). Engaged in exercises like Leg Pull Back, Swimming, and Shoulder Bridge.

External Obliques

Muscles on the front and side of the abdomen running from the lower seven ribs to the pubic tubercle, linea alba, and iliac crest. The fibers run diagonally downward and forward. These muscles provide spinal stability and enable trunk flexion and rotation toward the opposite side—essential for Criss Cross, Saw, and all rotational movements.

F

Fascia

Bands or sheets of connective tissue beneath the skin attaching, stabilizing, enclosing, and separating muscles and organs. Increasingly recognized in contemporary Pilates for its role in movement integration. Myofascial slings—anterior oblique, posterior oblique, lateral, and deep longitudinal—help transfer force between limbs

while stabilizing the core. Pilates exercises train fascia through whole-body, eccentric and concentric movements.

Feet in Straps (Series)

A series of Reformer exercises performed with feet placed in the long straps, including Frog, Leg Circles, Walking, Scissors, Bicycle, and Helicopter. This classical series challenges pelvic stability while legs move through various patterns. Also performed on the Cadillac.

Femur

The thigh bone—the longest and strongest bone in the body, extending from hip to knee. Understanding femur alignment is crucial for proper hip placement, leg exercises, and preventing knee strain.

Find Your Center

A cueing instruction to connect mentally and physically to the core/powerhouse before initiating movement. Commonly used at the beginning of exercises or class.

First-Generation Teachers

See *Elders*.

Fitness Circle

See *Circle*.

Flat Back

A position where the spine is elongated without excessive curve, creating a flat line from tailbone to crown of head. Used in exercises like Short Box Flat Back; distinct from neutral spine.

Flex-Band (Resistance Band)

Elastic bands of varying lengths and resistance levels adding resistance or assistance to exercises. A contemporary addition, Flex-Bands are useful for upper body work, leg exercises, stretching, and portable practice. Also called Pilates bands or Therabands.

Flexion

A bending movement that decreases the angle between two bones or body segments. In spinal terms, rounding forward—the opposite of extension. Fundamental to Roll Up, Spine Stretch Forward, and all abdominal curling exercises like The Hundred and Single Leg Stretch.

Flexors

Muscles that bend joints, decreasing the angle between bones. In Pilates, commonly references hip flexors

(iliopsoas, rectus femoris), knee flexors (hamstrings), and neck flexors. Hip flexors—often tight from sitting—are frequently addressed through stretches like Eve's Lunge and Front Splits.

Fletcher Percussive Breath

A rhythmic, audible breathing technique developed by Ron Fletcher featuring sharp, percussive exhalations through pursed lips creating a "sniffing" or pulsing quality. Based on Fletcher's study with Joseph Pilates and research into pulmonology, this technique connects breath to movement and increases lung capacity.

Fletcher Pilates

A Pilates education program and methodology developed by Ron Fletcher, offering legacy-based training including unique techniques: Percussive Breath, Towelwork (upper body exercises with a rolled towel), and Floorwork (standing exercises derived from Martha Graham technique). Fletcher's approach merged his training under both Martha Graham and Joseph Pilates.

Flow

One of the six foundational Pilates principles emphasizing smooth, continuous, graceful transitions between exercises. Each movement should seamlessly connect to the next, creating fluid sequences building both strength and stamina. First articulated in *The Pilates Method of Physical and Mental Conditioning* (1980), Flow applies within exercises and between them. Romana Kryzanowska described Pilates as "flowing motion outward from a strong center."

Foam Roller

A cylindrical tube of foam used for self-myofascial release (self-massage), balance challenges, and core stability exercises. While a contemporary addition—not part of Joseph Pilates' original apparatus—the Foam Roller became popular in the 2000s for its versatility and portability. It can approximate Reformer-like movement patterns on the mat.

Foot Corrector

A specialized Pilates apparatus designed to strengthen foot muscles, correct alignment issues, improve balance, and lift the arches. Consisting of a weighted base with a curved saddle and spring-loaded pedal, this original Joseph Pilates apparatus strengthens arches, corrects pronation/supination, and creates deeper connection between feet, legs, and core.

Footbar

A padded bar at one end of the Reformer adjustable to various heights and angles, serving as a platform for pushing during Footwork and for hand placement during exercises like Long Stretch Series. Adjustable positions accommodate different body sizes and exercises.

Footwork (Series)

The first exercise series on the Reformer, performed supine with feet on the footbar. Various foot positions—heels, arches, toes, V-position, wide—press the carriage away and return with control. Joseph Pilates designed this as the initial warmup, mobilizing and lengthening the back, warming the legs, and teaching neutral spine maintenance. Variations include Running (prances), single-leg work, and Tendon Stretch.

Forward Fold / Forward Flexion

Bending forward from the hips or spine, creating spinal flexion. Used in Roll Down, Spine Stretch Forward, and stretching sequences.

Frame (Body Box)

The imaginary rectangular area formed by shoulders and hips, used as reference for maintaining proper alignment. "Keep your frame square" means keeping shoulders and hips level and aligned.

Frog

A fundamental Reformer exercise performed supine with feet in long straps, heels together and toes apart in external rotation. The legs extend and bend while maintaining pelvic stability. Part of Joseph Pilates' original Feet in Straps series, Frog echoes Footwork while strengthening the midline, hip adductors, and core. Variations include Wide Frog, High Frog, and Frog on mat with Theraband.

Front Splits

An advanced Reformer exercise with one foot on the footbar and the other pressing into the shoulder rest, creating a split position. Part of the Splits Series near the end of the classical Reformer order, Front Splits opens hip flexors, stretches thighs, and works each side individually to address asymmetries. Progressions include Russian Splits and Big Splits.

Full Body Integration

The Pilates principle that all exercises involve the whole body working as an integrated unit, with movement originating from the center and flowing outward. Even exercises targeting specific areas engage the entire body for support and stability.

Fundamentals (Pre-Pilates)

Foundational exercises and movement skills taught before the classical repertoire, designed to develop body awareness, alignment, and basic movement patterns. Eve Gentry's "Mini-Moves" became the foundation of the Fundamentals approach, helping beginners understand core concepts before tackling more complex exercises.

George Balanchine

Legendary ballet choreographer and founder of the School of American Ballet who referred injured dancers to Joseph Pilates for rehabilitation—including Romana Kryzanowska. His influence connected Pilates to the ballet community, establishing the lasting relationship between Pilates and dance that continues today.

Gluteals (Glutes)

The trio of buttock muscles comprising **Gluteus Maximus**, **Gluteus Medius**, and **Gluteus Minimus**—part of the Pilates Powerhouse. Critical for hip extension, abduction, external rotation, and pelvic stability. Weak or imbalanced glutes contribute to runner's knee, shin splints, lower back pain, and lateral hip issues.

Gluteus Maximus

The largest and outermost gluteal muscle responsible for hip extension, outward rotation, and abduction of the thigh. The primary hip extensor, crucial for climbing stairs, running, and standing from seated. Active in Grasshopper, Bridging, Swan, and all hip extension work.

Gluteus Medius

Located above and to the side of Gluteus Maximus; the primary hip abductor. Critical for single-leg stability and lateral movements; often weak in runners, contributing to lateral hip pain. Targeted in side-lying exercises and single-leg standing work.

Gluteus Minimus

The smallest and deepest gluteal muscle, assisting in hip abduction and internal rotation. Works synergistically with other gluteal muscles for hip stability.

Going Down the Mountain

Advanced Wunda Chair exercises where the practitioner stands on the chair and pumps the pedal while maintaining balance. Available in Front and Side variations, these exercises challenge balance, body awareness, and full-body control.

Going Up Front

A standing Wunda Chair exercise where the practitioner faces the chair, places one foot on the pedal, and steps up while controlling pedal movement. This classical exercise develops pelvis stabilization muscles (gluteus medius and maximus, transversus abdominis), strengthens quadriceps and hamstrings, and challenges balance.

Going Up Side

A lateral Wunda Chair exercise performed from the side of the chair, requiring external rotation and significant hip/leg strength. Typically follows Going Up Front in classical order and progresses to Side Balance Control.

Grasshopper

A prone exercise targeting hip extensors. Performed lying face-down with knees bent, feet together, heels squeezed, lifting thighs off the floor while maintaining spinal neutrality. Strengthens the posterior chain, lengthens hamstrings, and helps prevent lower back pain. Performed on mat, Reformer (long box), Ladder Barrel, Spine Corrector, or Baby Arc—often in series with Rocking and Swimming.

Gratz Pilates Equipment

The original manufacturer of authentic Pilates apparatus built to Joseph Pilates' exact specifications. Founded in 1929 by MIT-trained engineer Frank Gratz and Edward Treitel as Treitel-Gratz Co., Inc. in New York City. In the late 1960s, Donald Gratz (Frank's son) collaborated with Romana Kryzanowska to fabricate apparatus true to Joseph Pilates' original designs. The company motto: "Joe invented it. Gratz makes it." Recognized as the gold standard in classical Pilates equipment, Gratz produces Universal Reformers, Cadillacs, Wunda Chairs, High Chairs, Ladder Barrels, Guillotines, and accessories.

Grip

The manner in which hands or feet hold equipment handles, straps, or bars. Proper grip ensures safety and effective work. Instructors also cue to avoid "gripping"—excessive muscle tension that should be released.

Grip Pads / Sticky Pads

Non-slip pads used on Pilates equipment to prevent slipping during exercises, particularly headstands and kneeling work.

Grounding

The practice of establishing stable contact with a surface to create a foundation for movement. Involves pressing body parts into the mat, equipment, or floor to create stability and awareness. Common cue: "Ground your pelvis into the mat before moving your legs."

Guillotine Tower (Guillotine)

A vertical floor-to-ceiling apparatus designed by Joseph Pilates featuring a tall frame with springs, bars, and straps mounted over a mat. Ron Fletcher called it "the genitive apparatus for hip and spine articulation." The Guillotine provides pelvic stabilization and lumbar articulation, especially valuable for clients with tight hamstrings and hip flexors, challenging the body against gravity in a vertical plane. Was a fixture in Joseph Pilates' original NYC studio.

H

Half Hanging

A category of exercises performed in partial suspension on the Cadillac or Guillotine, using upper body strength while legs work against gravity. Precedes Full Hanging in the progression.

Half Roll Back

A preparatory exercise rolling halfway back from seated position while maintaining a C-curve, then returning upright. Teaches spinal articulation and abdominal engagement as preparation for Roll Up and other flexion exercises.

Hamstrings

The muscle group at the back of the thigh comprising **biceps femoris**, **semitendinosus**, and **semimembranosus**—responsible for knee flexion and hip extension. Hamstrings work with abdominals to lift the pelvis in bridging and control the lowering phase of many exercises. Often tight from prolonged sitting, they require attention in Pilates practice.

Handles

Gripping components on Pilates apparatus including Reformer straps, chairs, and barrels—typically made of wood, leather, or aluminum. Proper grip technique is essential for safety and effective exercise execution.

Hanging (Exercises)

A category of exercises performed in suspension on the Cadillac or Guillotine, using upper body strength while legs work against gravity. Includes Half Hanging, Full Hanging, and Hanging Leg Lift.

Hannah Sakmirda

A first-generation Pilates teacher who worked in Joseph Pilates' gym, exchanging work for exercise sessions. Part of the early Pilates community in New York.

Harmony

The balanced coordination of body, mind, and spirit that Joseph Pilates sought through Contrology. Pilates exercises aim to create harmony between muscle groups, between movement and breath, and between physical and mental effort.

Head Nod (Chin Nod)

The gesture of slightly nodding the head toward the throat to elongate the cervical spine before lifting head and shoulders. Essential preparation for The Hundred, Roll Up, and all exercises requiring head/shoulder curl.

Headstand (Facing Down / Facing Up)

Advanced Reformer exercises where the practitioner inverts with head on the headrest and moves springs through leg movements. Headstand Facing Down and Headstand Facing Up challenge center, two-way stretch, and upper body strength.

Health

Joseph Pilates' ultimate goal for his method—complete health of body and mind, not just physical fitness. He saw poor posture, inefficient breathing, and sedentary lifestyles as roots of poor health; Contrology was designed to restore "physical vitality." This holistic approach distinguishes Pilates from simple exercise routines.

Helicopter

A dynamic leg exercise where legs scissor and circle, alternating positions from ceiling to mat, changing direction with each repetition. Challenges hip mobility, core control, and coordination. Often performed on Small Barrel or Spine Corrector as part of the leg series.

Alan Herdman

A first-generation Pilates teacher who brought Pilates to the United Kingdom in 1970, becoming instrumental in establishing the method in Europe. Trained with first-generation teachers in New York, his lineage continues through UK-based Pilates training.

High Chair (Electric Chair)

A chair apparatus with high back, seat, dual poles, and spring-loaded pedal—named for its resemblance to execution chambers. The most stable of the chair apparatus, particularly useful for clients needing extra support. Accommodates seated footwork and challenging standing exercises; excellent for clients who cannot lie down. Used in the "individual needs" portion of workouts.

Hinge

A movement pattern where the body folds at the hips while maintaining a straight spine—like a door hinging at the joint. Used to cue proper mechanics in exercises like Elephant and Flat Back Forward Fold, teaching hip dissociation from spinal movement.

Hip Circles

An advanced mat exercise performed after Teaser where arms reach back and legs circle while the torso remains stable. The seat "steers" the legs in circular motions, challenging endurance while stretching spine and hamstrings. Also performed on Spine Corrector with handles for more stability.

Hip Extension

Movement increasing the angle between thigh and trunk, moving the leg backward. Targeted in Grasshopper, Swan, Swimming; often limited due to shortened hip flexors from sitting.

Hip Flexion

Movement decreasing the angle between thigh and trunk, bringing knee toward chest. Present in many Pilates exercises including The Hundred, Single Leg Stretch, and Teaser.

Hip Flexors

Muscles at the front of the hips including **psoas major/minor**, **iliacus** (together forming iliopsoas), and **rectus femoris**. The iliopsoas is the strongest hip flexor. Joseph Pilates considered these muscles part of the Powerhouse. Critical for bringing thigh toward trunk and bending torso forward—active in The Hundred, Teaser, and all exercises with lifted legs in supine position. Often both tight and weak from sitting.

Hip Joint

The ball-and-socket joint connecting femur to pelvis, allowing movement in multiple planes. Hip articulation is a primary focus of apparatus like the Guillotine and exercises throughout the repertoire.

Hip Lateral / Medial Rotation

Hip lateral rotation (external rotation) turns the thigh away from midline; hip medial rotation (internal rotation) turns the thigh toward midline. Used in Pilates stance, clam exercises, and hip mobility work.

Hip Twist (Hip Twist with Stretched Arms)

A seated exercise where legs circle together while the upper body remains stable, challenging core control and hip mobility. Often performed in sequence with Helicopter.

Hollowing

Drawing the abdominal wall inward toward the spine, creating a "scooped" or hollow appearance. Key cueing term for core engagement: "Hollow out your belly," "Scoop your abs in and up." Related terms include navel to spine and drawing in.

Wee Tai Hom (Wei Tai Hom)

Owner of the original Pilates Studio who worked with Romana Kryzanowska to implement a formalized teacher-training program in the 1970s-80s. Issued certificates to instructors completing the program. Important figure in institutionalizing Pilates teacher training.

Hot Potato

A Side Kick series variation where the leg performs rapid, controlled movements resembling tapping a hot

potato. Challenges hip stability and control within the classical Side Kick repertoire.

Hug the Midline

Instruction to engage inner thigh muscles and draw legs toward center, creating stability. Used in The Hundred, Double Leg Stretch, and exercises requiring adductor engagement.

The Hundred (100s)

The signature Pilates warm-up exercise and first of the 34 original mat exercises. Performed supine, lifting head and shoulders, extending legs, and pumping arms up and down while breathing five counts in and five counts out—repeated ten times for **100 total pumps**. Named for this count, The Hundred appears in Joseph Pilates' *Return to Life Through Contrology* (1945). The exercise increases blood circulation, warms the body, builds core strength, and develops breath control, targeting the entire abdominal wall, hip flexors, and inner thighs. Modifications include tabletop position (beginner) and lower leg angles (advanced). Performed on mat, Reformer, Cadillac, and Chair.

Hyperextension

Extension beyond normal range, particularly of joints like knees and elbows. Generally avoided in Pilates for joint protection; instructors cue to maintain "soft" knees and elbows to prevent hyperextension.

Conclusion

This encyclopedia documents the comprehensive vocabulary of Pilates practice—from **Ab Prep** to **Hyperextension**, spanning Joseph Pilates' original Contrology exercises, the apparatus he invented, the anatomical knowledge essential for proper instruction, and the first-generation teachers who preserved his legacy. Understanding this terminology enriches practice whether one follows classical methodology or contemporary approaches.

The terms reveal Pilates' distinctive philosophy: movement initiating from a strong **Powerhouse**, performed with **Control** and **Concentration**, flowing with **breath** and **precision**. Equipment like the **Cadillac** and **Reformer** emerged from Pilates' innovative rehabilitation work, while exercises like **The Hundred** and **Elephant** demonstrate his genius for combining strength, flexibility, and coordination challenges.

The Elders—**Clara Pilates**, **Carola Trier**, **Eve Gentry**, **Ron Fletcher**, **Kathy Grant**, and their peers—ensured these principles survived. Contemporary certifications from organizations like **BASI Pilates**, **Balanced Body**, and **Fletcher Pilates** continue transmitting this knowledge globally. Whether studying classical sequences or contemporary adaptations, practitioners benefit from fluency in this vocabulary—the language of controlled, conscious movement that Joseph Pilates called "the complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit."