

The Comprehensive Pilates Encyclopedia: I through P

This definitive reference continues from the A-H volume, covering every term a Pilates practitioner, instructor, or student might encounter. **Joseph Pilates created a complete system of body conditioning** that extends far beyond simple exercises—encompassing specialized equipment, precise anatomical understanding, a rich historical lineage of master teachers, and a unique vocabulary that has evolved over nearly a century. This encyclopedia documents that comprehensive terminology from letters I through P.

I

Iliopsoas

The **iliopsoas** is a large compound muscle of the inner hip, often called the body's most important core muscle. It consists of two primary muscles—the **psoas major** originating from the transverse processes of vertebrae T12-L5, and the **iliacus** originating from the upper two-thirds of the iliac fossa. These muscles merge to insert onto the lesser trochanter of the femur.

In Pilates practice, proper iliopsoas engagement lengthens the torso and lumbar spine while creating space in the hip socket for free leg movement. [Centerworks](#) The muscle serves as the primary hip flexor and plays critical roles in maintaining hip joint integrity [Physiopedia](#) and supporting spinal curves. Tight or overactive iliopsoas commonly causes lower back pain and poor posture—issues that Pilates exercises specifically address through strengthening while maintaining proper length. Essential exercises engaging the iliopsoas include Footwork, Frog, Leg Circles, Hamstring Stretch, and Stomach Massage on the Reformer. [Centerworks](#)

Iliotibial Band (IT Band)

The **iliotibial band** is a thick band of fascia running along the lateral thigh from the hip to the knee, formed proximally by the fascia of the gluteus maximus, gluteus medius, and tensor fasciae latae muscles. Unlike muscles, the IT band is connective tissue composed primarily of collagen fibers with no bony attachment along the femur. [Core Exercise Solutions](#)

Pilates addresses IT band issues by strengthening the gluteal muscles that attach to it and improving overall hip stability. The side-lying leg series and hip stabilization exercises prove particularly beneficial. IT Band Syndrome—a common overuse injury causing lateral hip or knee pain—often stems from weak hip abductor muscles, [Physiopedia](#) which Pilates systematically strengthens.

Imprint (Imprinting)

Imprinting is a spinal position technique where, when lying supine, the practitioner draws the belly "in and up" so the entire spine presses into the mat with no space between the lower back and floor. [Pilatesanytime](#) The pubic bone rises slightly higher than the hip bones through posterior pelvic tilt. [Pilatesanytime](#)

Classical Pilates frequently uses imprint as the standard supine position, while contemporary approaches often prefer neutral spine, reserving imprint for situations where leg extensions or increased spinal load demand additional protection. Imprint proves particularly valuable for beginners learning abdominal engagement and for exercises like Jackknife, Roll Over, and The Hundred when performed in classical style.

Inferior

An anatomical directional term meaning toward the feet or lower part of the body. The opposite of **superior**. Used in cueing and anatomical descriptions throughout Pilates instruction.

Inhale

The breath in—one half of the fundamental Pilates breath cycle. Inhalation typically accompanies the preparation phase of exercises or the lengthening/extending phase of movements. During proper Pilates breathing, external intercostal muscles contract to expand the ribcage laterally and posteriorly ([Indigo Pilates](#)) rather than allowing the belly to expand outward.

Initiation

The starting point of a movement. In Pilates, most movements are **initiated from the core or Powerhouse** rather than from the extremities. Understanding proper initiation distinguishes advanced practitioners who move with integrated whole-body control from beginners who rely on momentum or superficial muscle engagement.

Inner Thigh Series

A collection of exercises specifically targeting the **adductor muscles**—the adductor longus, brevis, and magnus, along with the gracilis and pectineus. Commonly performed side-lying on the mat or standing on the Reformer carriage.

Mat exercises include Inner Thigh Lifts (lifting the bottom leg while side-lying with the top leg bent), Inner Thigh Circles, and side-lying adductor pulses. Reformer versions include Inner Thigh Slides (standing on the carriage, pressing out and in using inner thigh strength), Kneeling Inner Thigh variations, and Frog. These exercises stabilize the pelvis, support the knees, and enhance hip joint stability.

Instructor Certification (Instructor Training)

The formal education and credentialing process for individuals teaching Pilates professionally. Programs range from mat-only certifications (**40-100 hours**) to comprehensive programs covering all classical apparatus (**450+ hours** as required by the PMA for certification exam eligibility). ([Pilatesinstructoracademy](#))

Training components typically include anatomy and kinesiology education, movement principles and methodology, practice teaching hours, observation hours, self-practice requirements, and written and practical examinations. Major training organizations include BASI Pilates, STOTT PILATES, Balanced Body, Peak Pilates, Polestar Pilates, and classical lineage programs such as Romana's Pilates.

Integration

A fundamental Pilates principle connecting all body parts to work together as a unified whole. Integration involves coordinating mind, breath, and body to create efficient, harmonious movement. Every exercise engages the whole body even when targeting specific areas, with movements originating from the center and radiating outward. The principle manifests through opposition and two-way stretch, flowing transitions, and exercises building upon each other in classical sequences.

Intercostal Breathing (Intercostal Muscles)

The **intercostal muscles** are located between each rib ([Cleveland Clinic](#)) in three layers: external intercostals (contracting during inhalation to expand the ribcage), internal intercostals (contracting during exhalation to compress the ribcage), ([Indigo Pilates](#)) and innermost intercostals (assisting forced expiration). ([Study.com](#))

Intercostal breathing—also called **lateral breathing**—is fundamental to Pilates, emphasizing lateral ribcage expansion while maintaining abdominal engagement throughout both inhalation and exhalation. This allows deep breathing while preserving core stability, differing from diaphragmatic breathing where the abdomen relaxes. ([Human Kinetics](#)) Ron Fletcher developed **percussive breathing**, a specialized approach using sound and rhythm emphasizing staged internal intercostal contraction.

Internal Rotation

Rotation of a limb toward the midline of the body. For the leg, this means the knee and toes turning inward. Understanding internal versus external rotation is essential for proper hip mechanics in Pilates exercises and identifying compensatory movement patterns.

Inversion (Inverted Exercises)

Pilates exercises positioning the body upside down or with hips elevated above the heart and head. Common inverted exercises include Jackknife, Roll Over, Control Balance, Short Spine, Long Spine, High Scissors, and High Bicycle.

Benefits include reversing gravitational pressure on the spine, improving circulation, challenging spinal articulation, and strengthening deep abdominal muscles. **Precautions** are significant: inversions are unsuitable for those with neck or spine injuries, high blood pressure, glaucoma, or certain eye conditions. Weight should remain on shoulders—never rolling onto the neck.

Isometric Contraction

A muscle contraction where the muscle fires but doesn't change length. Used extensively in Pilates for stabilization—maintaining core engagement, holding positions, and supporting the spine while limbs move. Distinguished from isotonic contractions where muscles lengthen or shorten during movement.

ITTAP (International Teacher Trainer Accreditation for Pilates)

An accreditation program administered by the Pilates Method Alliance providing standards of excellence for teacher training programs worldwide. The program offers **Mat Accreditation**, **Reformer Accreditation**, and

Comprehensive Accreditation tiers, [Pilatesmethodalliance](#) each requiring up to ten educational standards including observation, practice teaching, self-practice requirements, and qualified teacher trainers.

J

Jackknife (Jack Knife)

An advanced classical mat exercise—# [Lucy Filce](#) **20 in Joseph Pilates' original 34 exercises**—combining spinal articulation with an overhead position and strong hip extension. Starting supine with arms by sides and legs toward the ceiling, the practitioner exhales while engaging abdominals, rolling the spine off the mat and taking legs overhead parallel to floor. From there, legs reach straight up ("jackknife" position), lifting pelvis and tailbone toward the sky before articulating down vertebra by vertebra.

The movement rhythm follows a six-count: over (1), kick up (2), roll down (3, 4, 5), touch/return (6). Jackknife strengthens back extensors, develops spinal articulation and mobility, and challenges balance and control.

Precautions include avoiding with neck, shoulder, or spine injuries, osteoporosis, and never rolling onto the neck. Variations exist on the Spine Corrector, Wunda Chair, Reformer, and Cadillac.

Jay Grimes (1940-2024)

A first-generation **Pilates Elder** who studied directly with Joseph Pilates beginning in the mid-1960s and continued with Clara Pilates for another decade after Joseph's death. A professional dancer in ballet and Broadway for eighteen years, Grimes never suffered an injury during his dance career—which he attributed entirely to Pilates.

Grimes eventually co-founded **Vintage Pilates** in Los Angeles and became known for maintaining strict adherence to Joseph Pilates' original work. His stated goal was "not to have anything in his studio that Joe wouldn't recognize if he came back to life today." His advice to teachers emphasized restraint: "Don't over correct—let them find their way and just get them moving." His exercise sequences, particularly the Jay Grimes Reformer Order and Wunda Chair Order, remain references in classical training. He passed away July 29, 2024, at age 84. [Upgrade Pilates](#)

Joint Articulation

The movement of a joint through its range of motion. Pilates emphasizes smooth, controlled articulation, particularly of the spine—moving vertebra by vertebra rather than in large chunks. Spinal articulation appears in exercises like Roll Up, Roll Over, Pelvic Curl, and throughout the classical repertoire.

Joseph Hubertus Pilates (1883-1967)

The German-born founder of the Pilates method, originally called **Contrology**. Born December 9, 1883, in Mönchengladbach, Germany, Pilates suffered from asthma, rickets, and rheumatic fever as a child, dedicating

his life to overcoming physical weakness through exercise. By age fourteen, he was fit enough to pose for anatomical charts, having studied gymnastics, bodybuilding, martial arts, and various movement disciplines.

After moving to England in 1912 [\(Wikipedia\)](#) and being interned during WWI on the Isle of Man, Pilates refined his exercises teaching fellow internees. He immigrated to the United States around 1925-1926, meeting his wife **Clara Zeuner** on the voyage. They opened the "Body Contrology" studio at 939 8th Avenue in Manhattan, attracting devoted followers particularly from the dance community including New York City Ballet dancers.

His publications include *Your Health: A Corrective System of Exercising* (1934) and *Return to Life Through Contrology* (1945), containing the original **34 mat exercises**. [\(Alo Moves\)](#) His philosophy emphasized that "Physical fitness is the first requisite of happiness" [\(BASITM Pilates\)](#) and "It is the mind itself which builds the body." He invented **26 patented apparatus** including the Universal Reformer, Cadillac, Wunda Chair, Barrels, Ped-O-Pul, and Magic Circle.

Jump Board (Jumpboard)

A padded board accessory attaching to a Pilates Reformer in place of the footbar, providing a stable surface for **plyometric (jumping) exercises** while lying supine, side-lying, or in plank position. Features include padded surface with EVA foam for shock absorption, steel or wood frame construction, and vinyl covering for durability.

Jump Board work adds cardiovascular training to Pilates practice while remaining **low-impact**—the horizontal position reduces gravitational stress on joints compared to standing jumps. [\(RTR Pilates\)](#) Exercises include supine jumping in parallel, Pilates V, and wide stance; single leg jumps; prancing; scissor jumps; and side-lying lateral variations. Major manufacturers include Balanced Body, Peak Pilates, Align-Pilates, BASI Systems, and Gratz.

Jumping (Jump Exercises)

Plyometric exercises performed on a Reformer with Jump Board attachment. The practitioner pushes off from and lands on the jump board while the carriage slides along rails, with springs providing resistance. Proper form requires maintaining core engagement throughout, articulating through the feet on landing (toe-ball-heel sequence), coordinating breath with jumping rhythm, keeping the spine stable, and controlling carriage return without slamming.

K

Kathy Grant (1921-2010)

Kathleen Stanford Grant was an African American dancer, choreographer, and first-generation Pilates instructor — [\(Wikipedia\)](#) one of only **two people ever officially certified by Joseph Pilates himself**. [\(Clubpilates\)](#) Born August 1, 1921, in Boston, [\(Pilates\)](#) she studied ballet at the Boston Conservatory, [\(Wikipedia\)](#) danced in Harlem's famous clubs, and performed on Broadway in "Finian's Rainbow" and "Kiss Me, Kate." [\(Wikipedia\)](#)

In 1954, after knee surgery, dancer Pearl Bailey referred her to Joseph Pilates. [Pilates Anytime](#) In 1967, along with Lolita San Miguel, Grant completed **2,200 hours** of observation and training, becoming officially certified under the New York State Vocational Rehabilitation Program. [Pilates Anytime](#) She later directed the Pilates program at Henri Bendel's Department Store and from 1988 until her death taught at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. [Pilates Anytime](#) [Fusionpilatesedu](#)

Her major contributions include creating "**Before the Hundred**"—a series of preparatory exercises building body awareness before classical work—and her exceptional verbal cueing using imagery and visualization. [Clubpilates](#) She was the first Black woman to teach Pilates (starting 1957) [Pilates Anytime](#) [Fusionpilatesedu](#) and mentored significant teachers including Blossom Leilani Crawford and Cara Reeser. The Kathy Grant Heritage Training Program continues her methodology.

Kettlebell

A handheld weight with a handle sometimes incorporated into contemporary or fusion Pilates workouts for additional resistance. **Not a traditional Pilates prop**—kettlebells appear in modified styles like Lagree Method and "Pilates-inspired" fitness classes rather than classical practice.

Kinetic Chain

The interconnected segments of the body working together during movement. Understanding kinetic chain concepts helps explain how movement in one body part affects others and why Powerhouse engagement influences the entire body. Pilates exercises develop awareness of how proper alignment creates efficient movement patterns through the chain.

Knee Extension

Straightening of the leg at the knee joint, [pilatesencyclopedia](#) increasing the angle between thigh and lower leg. Occurs throughout Pilates exercises including Leg Circles, The Hundred, Leg Pull, and footwork series on the Reformer.

Knee Flexion

Bending of the knee, decreasing the angle between the back of the thigh and lower leg. Essential in exercises like Knee Stretches, Single Leg Stretch, Double Leg Stretch, and transitions between movements.

Knee Stretches (Series)

A fundamental Reformer series performed kneeling with hands on the footbar and feet against shoulder blocks. The three variations are:

Round Back: Spine in C-curve, pushing carriage out with legs while pulling in with control. [Pilates Anytime](#)

Arched (Flat) Back: Spine in neutral or slight extension, maintaining stable spine while moving carriage.

Knees Off (also called Tiger Stretch or Jackrabbit): Same setup but knees hover off carriage throughout movement. [The Core](#)

The series develops abdominal strength, hip flexibility, pelvic stability, and coordination. Teaching emphasis should focus on **pulling the carriage IN** rather than pushing out — listening for rhythm in the springs.

Online Pilates Classes

Kneeling Side Kicks

A mat or Reformer exercise performed kneeling with one hand on the floor and one leg extended to the side, kicking forward and back. The exercise challenges lateral stability, strengthens hip abductors and adductors, and develops balance and core control. Also known as **Side Kick Kneeling**.

Knit the Ribs

A common Pilates cue directing practitioners to draw the front ribs together and downward, preventing the ribcage from "popping" or flaring open. The cue maintains core engagement and prevents over-arching of the lower back (Pilates Anytime) while encouraging proper hip-to-rib connection.

Note: Some biomechanics experts argue this cue may restrict breathing and spinal mobility if over-applied.

(Lahela Fit) Historical photographs show Joseph Pilates with an open, expansive ribcage, suggesting this may be a more modern cueing addition. Alternative cues include "close the ribs," "soften the front ribs," and "maintain hip-to-rib connection."

Kinesiology

The scientific study of human movement. Contemporary Pilates training incorporates kinesiology principles to understand how muscles, bones, and joints work together. Understanding kinesiology helps instructors analyze movement patterns, identify compensations, and design effective exercise progressions.

Kyphosis

An outward (posterior) curvature of the spine, natural in the thoracic region. **Hyperkyphosis** (excessive kyphosis) creates a hunched or rounded upper back posture. Pilates addresses excessive kyphosis through extension exercises like Swan, Swimming, and Chest Expansion, balancing the thoracic curve with appropriate mobility and strength.

L

Ladder Barrel

A distinctive classical apparatus consisting of a curved, padded barrel attached to a wooden ladder with rungs at various heights. (Pilates Encyclopedia) The distance between ladder and barrel is typically adjustable to accommodate different body sizes, with premium versions offering ten or more preset positions. (Pilates)

Designed by Joseph Pilates, the Ladder Barrel provides support for **spinal articulation and stretching** with greater range of motion than mat work. Key exercises include Standing Back Bend, the Short Box Series

(Round Back, Flat Back, Oblique), Climb a Tree, Side Sit Up (Side Over), Bridging, Ballet Stretches, Mermaid, and Horseback. The apparatus proves particularly valuable for older clients or those with difficulty getting up and down from the floor. [Pilates Encyclopedia](#)

Lagree Method

A contemporary fitness method inspired by Pilates combining strength training and cardio on a specialized machine called a **Megaformer**. While influenced by Pilates principles, Lagree is considered a separate method with its own techniques and equipment rather than traditional Pilates.

Lateral

Anatomical term describing movement or body positioning near or toward the side of the body — [Pilatesanytime](#) away from the midline. The opposite of **medial**. Used in describing side-to-side movements, lateral arm raises, and positioning relative to the body's center.

Lateral Breathing (Lateral Thoracic Breathing)

The primary breathing technique in Pilates where breath is directed into the sides and back of the ribcage rather than into the belly. During inhalation, the ribcage expands laterally and posteriorly; during exhalation, ribs return to neutral while abdominal engagement continues. This allows **continuous core stabilization while breathing fully**, supporting spinal alignment during movement.

Often the hardest technique for beginners to master—instructors should prioritize comfortable breathing over perfect technique initially. Also called **post-lateral breathing** or **posterolateral breathing**.

Lateral Flexion

Side bending ([pilatesencyclopedia](#)) of the spine in the frontal/coronal plane, decreasing the angle between the trunk and hip on one side. Featured prominently in exercises like Mermaid, Side Bend, Side Stretches on the Ladder Barrel, and Spine Stretch Side.

Latissimus Dorsi

The large, flat muscle of the back spanning from the lower spine and pelvis to the upper arm (humerus), commonly called "the lats." Functions include shoulder extension, adduction, internal rotation, and spinal stabilization.

In Pilates, the latissimus dorsi is heavily engaged in pulling exercises (Pulling Straps, Long Stretch Series), arm work, and exercises requiring back connection. The muscle is key for maintaining proper shoulder blade positioning and the "arm-lat-back" connection emphasized in many exercises.

Layering

A teaching technique starting with simple exercise versions and progressively adding complexity, challenge, or new elements. [Capilates](#) Layering allows instructors to teach multi-level classes safely, meeting each client at

their current ability level. Example: Teaching Leg Circles first with bent knee, then straight leg, then adding arm movements.

Lean Muscle

Muscle with low fat content—the type typically developed through consistent Pilates practice. (VAURA Pilates) Pilates builds strength and definition without bulk through controlled resistance exercises emphasizing eccentric contraction and lengthening.

Leg Circles (Single Leg Circles, One Leg Circles)

A fundamental mat exercise—**#4 in Joseph Pilates' original 34 exercises**—performed supine with one leg circling in the hip joint while the rest of the body remains stable. (Pilateslessonplans)

Execution: Lie on back with arms pressed into mat, one leg extended on floor, other leg reaching toward ceiling. Cross the raised leg slightly across the body, circle down, around, and back up in a controlled motion. Perform **5-8 circles in each direction** before switching legs. The opposite hip must remain anchored to the mat.

The exercise challenges core control and hip stability while improving hip mobility, strengthening hip flexors and leg muscles, and stretching hamstrings. (Marie Claire UK) (GeorgeWatts.org) Variations include bent knee version (easier), Double Leg Circles (advanced), side-lying circles, and versions with resistance bands. (BODi)

Leg Pull (Leg Pull Back)

An advanced mat exercise—**#26 in the original 34**—performed in reverse plank position. Sitting with legs extended and hands behind hips (fingers forward), the practitioner lifts hips to create a straight line from shoulders to heels, then lifts one leg toward the ceiling while maintaining the plank. Also called **Leg Pull Up** or **Reverse Plank with Leg Pull**.

Leg Pull Front

An advanced mat exercise—**#25 in the original 34**—performed in plank position facing the mat. While maintaining stable pelvis and spine, the practitioner lifts one leg and pulses 2-3 times before switching. The exercise provides full-body strengthening and challenges arm and shoulder stability. Often taught alongside Leg Pull Back as complementary exercises working anterior and posterior chains.

Lengthen

A universal Pilates cue directing practitioners to elongate the body or specific body parts, creating maximum distance from one point to another. Applications include "lengthen your spine" (create space between vertebrae), "lengthen through the crown of the head" (achieve tall posture), (Pilates Anytime) and "lengthen your legs away" (reach through heels or toes). Related imagery: "Imagine a string pulling you toward the ceiling."

Levator Scapulae

A muscle at the back and side of the neck that elevates the shoulder blade. Often overworked in people with

poor posture. Pilates cues like "drop the shoulders" and "neck long" address tension in this muscle, while exercises promoting shoulder blade depression help release overactive levator scapulae.

Lift

A fundamental Pilates cue directing upward engagement or movement, essential to the method's **anti-gravity philosophy**. Applications include "lift your chest," "lift through the waist," "lift your legs from the Powerhouse," and "find lift in your spine." Joseph Pilates designed exercises compelling the body to create lift against gravity—the Long Stretch Series particularly requires finding lift to properly close the Reformer springs.

Ligaments

Tough bands of fibrous connective tissue connecting bone to bone ([pilatesencyclopedia](#)) and stabilizing joints. Understanding ligaments helps instructors recognize **hypermobility** and avoid overstretching joints. Pilates strengthens muscles around joints to support ligamentous stability. Commonly referenced ligaments include the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) of the knee and spinal ligaments.

Lolita San Miguel (b. 1934)

A Puerto Rican dancer and first-generation Pilates instructor—one of only **two people ever officially certified by Joseph Pilates**. Born October 9, 1934, in New York City, she trained at the School of American Ballet and performed as a soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet for over ten years.

In 1958, after a knee injury, she was introduced to Pilates at Carola Trier's studio. In 1967, along with Kathy Grant, she completed **2,200 hours** of training and became officially certified by Joseph and Clara Pilates.

([Pilates Anytime](#)) She founded Ballet Concierto de Puerto Rico in 1977 and created the **Lolita San Miguel Pilates Master Mentor Program** (2009) and **Lolita's Legacy**—a comprehensive 500-hour teacher training program.

Her philosophy of "Never Stop Learning" emphasizes continuing education and the evolution of Pilates with sports science advances while honoring its origins. She organized the first Pilates Day celebration in Joseph Pilates' birthplace of Mönchengladbach, Germany. ([Wikipedia](#)) As of this writing, she is the **last living first-generation teacher** directly connected to the founder.

Lolita's Legacy

A comprehensive **500-hour** Pilates teacher training program created by Lolita San Miguel, covering four modules addressing Mat, Reformer, Cadillac, Chair, Barrels, and auxiliary equipment. The program includes Anatomy of Movement, history and philosophy of Joseph Pilates, teaching protocols, and assessment skills. PMA (Pilates Method Alliance) recognized. ([Lolita's Legacy](#))

Long Back Stretch

A challenging exercise in the Long Stretch Series on the Reformer, performed facing the shoulder blocks with hands on footbar. Despite the name, this is **not an arm exercise**—the lower body must do the work, with emphasis on pressing heels into shoulder blocks and using the Powerhouse.

Long Box

A padded box used on the Reformer placed **lengthwise** (parallel to the rails) for exercises like Pulling Straps, Swan, and Backstroke. The same box placed **widthwise** across the carriage is called the Short Box.

Long Spine

A cue directing practitioners to elongate the entire spine, creating space between vertebrae. Used throughout Pilates instruction to encourage proper alignment and decompression of spinal structures.

Long Stretch (Long Stretch Series)

A signature Reformer series performed in standing/plank positions on the moving carriage. The classical series includes **Down Stretch, Long Stretch, Up Stretch (Pike), Elephant**, and Long Back Stretch.

The Long Stretch specifically: plank position with hands on footbar and feet against shoulder blocks, pushing carriage out by pressing into footbar and pulling in using back and core while maintaining a perfectly still spine —movement occurs from shoulder joints only. [\(Pilates Anytime\)](#) Typically performed on 2 heavy springs. This series represents the first time in the Reformer workout standing on the moving platform, [\(Pilates Andrea\)](#) developing upper body stability and teaching the concept of "finding lift" horizontally.

Lordosis

An inward (anterior) curvature of the spine, natural in the lumbar and cervical regions. **Hyperlordosis** (excessive lordosis) creates an exaggerated arch in the lower back. Pilates addresses excessive lordosis through core strengthening and pelvic alignment exercises. Finding **neutral spine** includes maintaining appropriate lumbar lordosis without exaggeration.

Low Chair

A compact Pilates apparatus consisting of a padded seat with a spring-loaded pedal, also known as the **Wunda Chair** or **Pilates Chair**. Originally designed by Joseph Pilates to double as furniture. Features include split or single pedal options and adjustable spring resistance. Key exercises include Footwork, Going Up Front, Going Up Side, Tendon Stretch, Frog, and Swan.

Low Impact

Exercises gentle on the body, particularly the joints, with minimal jumping or jarring movements. [\(VAURA Pilates\)](#) Pilates is **inherently low-impact**, making it suitable for rehabilitation, older adults, pregnant practitioners, and those with joint concerns. [\(Complete Pilates\)](#)

Lower Trapezius

The lower fibers of the trapezius muscle responsible for depressing and rotating the scapula. Key for proper shoulder positioning in Pilates—exercises that engage lower trapezius help counterbalance overactive upper trapezius and improve posture.

Lumbar Spine

The lower back region comprising **five vertebrae (L1-L5)** located below the thoracic spine and above the sacrum. In neutral position, the lumbar spine has a slight inward curve (lordosis).

Protecting and strengthening the lumbar spine is a primary Pilates goal. Concepts including neutral pelvis, imprinting, and Powerhouse engagement all relate to lumbar spine health. Pilates commonly addresses lower back pain, disc problems, excessive lordosis, and spinal stiffness affecting this region.

M

Magic Circle (Pilates Ring)

A flexible ring, typically **12-14 inches** in diameter, made of metal or rubber with small padded handles on either side. Also called Fitness Circle, Magic Ring, or simply Ring.

Invented by Joseph Pilates—legend holds he created the original from the steel ring of a beer keg. The Magic Circle adds resistance by squeezing it between hands, arms, thighs, or ankles, targeting muscles often neglected in traditional exercises including inner thighs (adductors), outer thighs, arms and chest, core, and upper back. Metal circles offer more resistance for advanced practitioners; rubber/plastic rings provide less resistance for beginners.

Marching

A fundamental exercise performed supine with alternating leg lifts while maintaining neutral spine and pelvic stability. Often used in warm-up sequences and to teach Powerhouse engagement and hip dissociation.

Mary Bowen (b. 1930)

Born January 18, 1930, Mary Bowen is the **most senior of the Pilates Elders still actively teaching**. She began studying with Joseph and Clara Pilates in 1959 at age 29, continuing for six and a half years with twice-weekly lessons.

Her major contribution is "**Pilates Plus Psyche**," integrating Jungian psychoanalysis with Pilates practice. She trained subsequently with Bob Seed, Romana Kryzanowska, Kathy Grant, Bruce King, and Jean Claude West. She founded "Your Own Gym" studio in Northampton, Massachusetts, and maintains studios in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Her philosophy emphasizes the whole person: "Joe addressed the whole body in every move. I have added to that addressing the whole person." She represents a direct lineage to the method's origins as the last living Elder who studied directly with Joseph Pilates for an extended period.

Mat (Pilates Mat)

The foundational surface for Pilates Mat work. A Pilates mat is typically **thicker than a yoga mat** (approximately 1/2 inch) to provide cushioning for the spine during rolling exercises. Mat work represents the foundation of the Pilates method—Joseph Pilates developed his original Contrology system while confined as a prisoner of war, using exercises requiring only floor space. His book *Return to Life Through Contrology* detailed the **34 original mat exercises**. Pilates

Mat Certification

Professional certification qualifying instructors to teach Pilates mat classes, typically including training on the full mat repertoire, modifications, anatomy, and teaching methodology. Programs range from **40-100+ hours** depending on organization. Major certifications include Balanced Body Mat Instructor, Power Pilates Core Mat I/II/III, Peak Pilates Classical Mat, and STOTT Pilates Mat Certification.

Mat Pilates

Pilates performed on a mat without apparatus, using body weight as resistance. Encompasses Joseph Pilates' original 34 exercises from *Return to Life Through Contrology*. Variations include **Classical Mat Pilates** (following original exercise order), **Contemporary Mat Pilates** (incorporating modern modifications), and **Enhanced Mat** (adding props like rings, rollers, and bands).

Medial

Anatomical term describing position or movement near or toward the midline of the body. The opposite of **lateral**.

Megaformer

A type of Reformer used in the Lagree Method, a contemporary fitness system combining Pilates principles with strength training and cardio. While Pilates-inspired, the Megaformer and Lagree Method are considered separate from traditional Pilates practice.

Mermaid

A side-bending and stretching exercise focusing on lengthening and opening the side body while improving mobility through the spine, ribs, and hips. Considered **the most important spine mobility exercise** in the Pilates repertoire because it moves the spine through all possible movement directions.

Performed from a Z-sit position (legs stacked to one side) with one arm reaching overhead in lateral flexion combined with rotation. The teaching cue "up is more important than over" emphasizes spinal length over lateral flexion depth. Variations exist on Mat (most challenging—requires hip mobility), Reformer (springs provide feedback), Cadillac/Tower (push-through bar offers leverage), and Wunda Chair (kneeling version).

Benefits include stretching obliques, lats, and deep back muscles; opening the side body and ribs for improved breathing; increasing thoracic spine mobility; improving hip mobility; and preparing for rotational sports like

golf and tennis.

Midline

An imaginary line running down the middle of the body from head to feet, dividing it into left and right halves. Instructors reference the midline when cueing movements toward (**adduction**) or away from (**abduction**) the body's center. Essential for understanding symmetry and balance in movement.

Mind-Body Connection

The integration of mental focus and physical movement central to Pilates practice. Joseph Pilates emphasized that mental will controls the body — "It is the mind itself which builds the body." Every exercise requires focused attention on precise movement execution, breathing patterns, and body sensations rather than mindless repetitions.

Mindfulness

Carrying out Pilates movements with heightened awareness of body, breath, and present moment. A core concept in the Pilates mind-body connection, mindfulness links to **Concentration**—one of the six classical Pilates principles.

Misalignment

Incorrect positioning of body parts during exercise leading to compensations, muscle imbalances, and potential injury. Common examples include anterior or posterior pelvic tilt, elevated or rounded shoulders, forward head posture, and collapsed waist in side bending. Correction methods include mirrors, tactile cueing, props for support, and verbal imagery.

Mobility

The ability to move freely and comfortably through a full range of motion around joints. Distinguished from **flexibility** (passive range of motion)—mobility involves active, controlled movement. Pilates develops controlled mobility in all planes while maintaining stability.

Modification

A change made to an exercise to adjust difficulty or accommodate individual needs, abilities, or conditions. Examples include bent knees instead of straight legs, head resting on mat instead of lifted, using props for support, and reducing range of motion. Essential for teaching diverse populations safely and effectively.

Monkey

A Reformer exercise developing hip flexor flexibility and spinal articulation while strengthening the legs, performed in a deep squat position on the footbar. Part of intermediate to advanced Reformer repertoire.

Moon Box

A specialized prop, typically a half-moon shaped cushion or box, providing support during exercises requiring spinal extension or hip opening. Used for modifications and to accommodate various body proportions.

Mountain Climber

A dynamic exercise combining plank position with alternating leg movements, building core stability, cardiovascular endurance, and coordination. While appearing in some Pilates classes, Mountain Climber is more common in fusion or contemporary programs than classical repertoire.

Movement Principles

The foundational concepts guiding Pilates practice: **Breath, Concentration, Centering, Control, Precision, and Flow**. These six principles, codified after Joseph Pilates' death based on his teachings and writings, provide the philosophical framework for all Pilates exercises.

Multifidus

A group of small, deep muscles running along the spine from the sacrum to the cervical vertebrae. Each muscle bridges over 2-6 vertebral levels in a distinctive "Christmas tree" pattern.

The multifidus stabilizes the spine at a segmental level, controls fine motor adjustments between vertebrae, and prevents excessive spinal movement. Research shows it's the **strongest stabilizing muscle in the back** due to its unique rod-like fiber structure. The multifidus works with transversus abdominis, pelvic floor, and diaphragm as the "Core-Tet" or deep core unit—part of what Romana Kryzanowska described as the Powerhouse.

Important: The multifidus works best in neutral spine position, not when the spine is flexed. It's often weakened in chronic low back pain. Exercises that strengthen multifidus include prone work (Swan, Swimming), all fours exercises, plank variations, and exercises maintaining neutral spine.

Muscle Memory

The neurological patterns developed through repeated practice allowing movements to become automatic. Pilates builds beneficial muscle memory through precise repetition—proper form practiced consistently becomes the body's default movement pattern.

N

Navel to Spine

A common verbal cue instructing practitioners to draw the belly button inward toward the spine to engage deep abdominal muscles.

Important caveat: Modern understanding suggests this cue may be problematic in neutral spine position. Pulling the navel in encourages lumbar flexion and posterior pelvic tilt, which can inhibit transversus abdominis engagement. Better alternatives include "keep tailbone/sacrum heavy on the table" for neutral spine work or "inhale into your back" to anchor ribs. The cue remains appropriate during spinal flexion exercises where posterior pelvic tilt is intended.

NCPT (Nationally Certified Pilates Teacher)

The credential awarded by the Pilates Method Alliance after passing their comprehensive certification exam, now part of the National Pilates Certification Program (NPCP). Represents a standard of excellence in Pilates education recognized industry-wide.

Neck Pull

An intermediate-to-advanced mat exercise—**#15 in Joseph Pilates' original sequence**—strengthening abdominals and back extensors while improving spinal mobility.

Starting supine with legs extended, feet hip-width apart and flexed, hands interlaced behind head with elbows wide. Exhale and curl head and shoulders up using abdominals, continuing to roll up bringing crown of head toward knees. Sit tall with spine extended, then tuck chin and round spine to roll back down, creating **opposition** by pressing head into hands while hands press into head on descent.

Key points: legs stay glued to mat throughout; don't pull on neck with hands; roll with abdominal control, not momentum. Avoid with neck/shoulder injury, osteoporosis, or acute lumbar disc issues. More challenging than Roll Up because arms cannot act as counterweight.

Neck Roll

A gentle mobility exercise involving circular movement of the head to release tension in the neck and shoulders. Often included as preparation or cool-down to mobilize the cervical spine. Movement should be slow and controlled, never forcing range of motion.

Neck Stretcher

A specialized apparatus designed by Joseph Pilates to stretch and strengthen muscles of the neck and upper back. One of the lesser-known pieces of classical equipment, focusing on proper neck alignment and mobility.

Negative (Eccentric) Contraction

Muscle contraction where the muscle lengthens while under tension, controlling movement against resistance. Example: the lowering phase during a Roll Up. Pilates emphasizes control during both concentric (shortening) and eccentric (lengthening) phases, distinguishing it from fitness methods focusing only on the lifting portion of exercises.

Neutral Pelvis

The optimal pelvic position where the ASIS (anterior superior iliac spine/hip bones) and pubic bone form a triangle that lies **parallel to the floor** when supine, or vertical when standing.

To find neutral pelvis: lie on back with knees bent, feel the two hip bones and pubic bone with fingers—these three points should be level, creating a "flat table." The imagery "balance a teacup on your lower belly" helps: if pelvis tilts forward (anterior tilt), teacup spills forward; if pelvis tilts back (posterior tilt), teacup spills backward.

Neutral Spine

The natural spinal position where its three curves are maintained without tucking or over-arching—**not a "straight" spine** but the body's ideal alignment.

The three curves: Cervical curve (neck)—inward curve (lordosis) with 7 vertebrae; Thoracic curve (mid-back)—outward curve (kyphosis) with 12 vertebrae; Lumbar curve (lower back)—inward curve (lordosis) with 5 vertebrae.

To find neutral spine supine: lie on back with knees bent and feet flat, rock pelvis forward and back, settle at the midpoint where lower back has a small natural curve. The space under the lumbar spine should be at navel level, not bra strap level. The **three-point-contact shortcut**: back of head, space between shoulder blades, and lower sacrum should contact the mat.

Neutral spine distributes weight evenly across the spine, provides stability while minimizing strain on discs and joints, and allows optimal engagement of deep core muscles. It is the strongest, most efficient position for the spine—essential for stabilization exercises including footwork, planks, kneeling series, and squats.

Nodding (Head Nod)

A preparatory exercise involving gentle nodding of the head up and down while maintaining proper neck and upper back alignment and stability. Used to find cervical alignment and initiate neck flexion properly—the chin draws slightly toward the chest by engaging deep neck flexors rather than straining superficial neck muscles.

Nutation

The forward tilting movement of the sacrum relative to the pelvis. The opposite movement is **counternutation**. Understanding sacral mechanics helps instructors address sacroiliac joint issues and pelvic alignment.

NPCP (National Pilates Certification Program)

The certification program administered by the Pilates Method Alliance (PMA), formerly called PMA-CPT. The exam consists of **150 multiple-choice questions** requiring **450+ hours** of lecture, self-study, and assisted teaching. Certification is valid for 2 years with 16 continuing education credits (CECs) required for renewal.

O

Obliques (External and Internal)

The oblique muscles located on the sides of the abdomen are essential components of the **Powerhouse**. The **external obliques** form the outermost layer, running diagonally downward from ribs to pelvis. The **internal obliques** lie beneath, running in the opposite direction.

These muscles are crucial for rotation, lateral flexion (side bending), and spinal stabilization. They work to "hollow the space between the hip bones" and are heavily engaged in exercises like Criss Cross, Spine Twist, and Saw.

One Leg Circle

See Leg Circles

One Leg Kick (Single Leg Kick)

A prone (face-down) exercise—part of the original 34 mat exercises—strengthening back extensors, hamstrings, and glutes while stretching quadriceps and hip flexors. Lying face down with forearms supporting the upper body, the practitioner kicks one heel toward the buttocks in a pulsing motion, then switches legs.

One Leg Stretch (Single Leg Stretch)

Part of the "**Series of Five**" abdominal exercises. Curling head and shoulders off the mat, the practitioner holds one knee to chest while extending the other leg, with hands placed on the bent knee's shin. Legs switch rhythmically while maintaining stable pelvis and lifted torso.

Open Leg Rocker (Rocker with Open Legs)

An intermediate-level classical mat exercise—**#9 in the original sequence**—that stimulates and massages the spine while challenging balance and control. Joseph Pilates called it "Rocker with Open Legs" in *Return to Life*.

Balancing on sit bones with legs extended in a V-shape and holding the ankles, maintain a C-curve through the spine and rock backward to the shoulder blades on the inhale, then exhale to return to the balanced V position. **The head should never touch the mat.** Arms stay straight and the body shape remains constant throughout.

Not suitable for those with osteoporosis, neck, shoulder, or lower back issues. Variations include prep version with bent knees and advanced versions holding toes instead of ankles or adding leg opening/closing at the top.

Opposition

A fundamental Pilates concept involving stretching or reaching in **opposite directions simultaneously**. This creates length in the body and engages deeper core muscles.

Opposition appears throughout Pilates instruction: in Double Leg Stretch, arms reach overhead while legs extend forward; in standing work, the crown of the head reaches upward while the tailbone lengthens

downward. Creating opposition makes movements more efficient and reveals the body's full potential for lengthening. Also called **two-way stretch**.

Overball (Small Ball, Pilates Ball)

A smaller, softer inflatable ball—typically **9 inches (23cm)** diameter—used in Mat Pilates for support, feedback, or added resistance. The overball can be placed under the pelvis for support, between the knees for adductor activation, behind the back for proprioceptive feedback, or squeezed for added challenge.

P

Paraspinals

The muscles running alongside the spine helping keep it upright and providing torso mobility. In Pilates, paraspinals work together with the core to create balanced spinal support. Essential for back extension exercises like Swan Dive, Swimming, and other prone work—they balance the action of the abdominals.

Peak Pilates

A major Pilates certification and equipment company emphasizing classical instruction based on Joseph Pilates' original teachings. Peak Pilates offers comprehensive training programs including mat, reformer, and apparatus courses with graduates eligible to test for PMA certification. Program pricing ranges from \$350-\$650+ per module, with a 500-hour comprehensive course available. The company manufactures equipment including the Ped-o-Pul and Reformers.

Pedal (Chair Pedal, Split Pedal)

The spring-loaded lever on the Pilates Wunda Chair providing resistance when pressed. Modern chairs may feature a **split pedal** allowing each side to move independently for asymmetrical exercises and to address muscle imbalances.

Ped-o-Pul (Pedi-Pole)

A classical apparatus consisting of a T-shaped rod at the top connected to a tall metal pole mounted in a wooden base (often kidney-shaped or square), with springs and handles hanging from the horizontal portion.

Originally designed by Joseph Pilates, the pole represents the spine and addresses shoulder girdle issues. The upright design encourages **vertical movement and full-body awareness** in functional standing positions, strengthening supporting spinal muscles, creating space between vertebrae, opening the chest, assisting breath training, and helping find the "two-way stretch." Instrumental in Eve Gentry's rehabilitation work and used extensively by vocal coach William Pierce Herman. Exercises include Arm Circles, Side Bend Standing, and centering exercises.

Peel

A verbal cue describing sequential articulation of the spine off or onto the mat, **like peeling a sticker**. Common in exercises like Pelvic Curl, Roll Up, and Spine Curls. "Peel your spine off the mat one vertebra at a time."

Pelvic Clock

An imagery cue visualizing the pelvis as a clock face to guide pelvic tilts and movements. Moving from **12 o'clock** (pubic bone toward nose) to **6 o'clock** (pubic bone away) represents anterior/posterior tilting; **3 o'clock** to **9 o'clock** represents side-to-side tilting. Used to teach awareness of pelvic movements and find neutral pelvis position.

Pelvic Curl (Pelvic Lift, Bridge)

A fundamental exercise mobilizing the spine, strengthening abdominals and glutes, and stretching hip flexors—often one of the first exercises taught to beginners.

Lying supine with knees bent and feet flat on mat, exhale to engage core and posteriorly tilt pelvis, then articulate the spine off the mat **one vertebra at a time** until body forms a straight line from knees to shoulders. Inhale at top, then exhale to roll down, placing one vertebra at a time. Also called **Bridge** or **Shoulder Bridge Prep**. Variations include single leg versions and Reformer Pelvic Lift with footwork springs.

Pelvic Floor

A group of muscles forming the floor of the pelvis, connecting the pubic bone to the tailbone and sit bones—**like a "bouncy trampoline."** Part of the Powerhouse.

The pelvic floor supports pelvic organs, maintains bladder/bowel control, contributes to sexual function, and provides core stability. It engages automatically with deep abdominal activation and works in harmony with the diaphragm and deep core muscles to regulate intra-abdominal pressure. When sit bones draw closer together, pelvic floor shortens/engages; when sit bones spread apart, pelvic floor lengthens.

Pelvic Tilt

A foundational movement involving rocking the pelvis anteriorly (forward/arching low back) or posteriorly (backward/flattening low back). Used to find neutral pelvis and establish core engagement.

Lying supine, inhale to allow natural lumbar curve, exhale to engage deep abdominals and rock pubic bone toward nose (posterior tilt), gently flattening low back. **The movement comes from the abs, not the glutes**—clenching glutes is a common mistake. This is not a hip bridge.

Pilates, Clara

Wife of Joseph Pilates and co-founder of the Pilates method. She worked alongside Joseph at their studio in New York City from the 1920s until his death in 1967 and continued teaching afterward. She helped develop and teach the method, particularly rehabilitation aspects. Many first-generation teachers (Elders) trained with both Joseph and Clara.

Pilates, Joseph Hubertus (1883-1967)

See Joseph Hubertus Pilates under "J"

Pilates Method Alliance (PMA)

The professional industry association for Pilates teachers, business owners, and supporters, founded in **2001**. A non-profit organization dedicated to maintaining high standards in the Pilates industry.

The PMA created the **only psychometrically validated, third-party certification exam** in the Pilates field—the National Pilates Certification Program (NPCP). The exam consists of 150 multiple-choice questions requiring 450+ hours of lecture, self-study, and assisted teaching. Certification is valid for 2 years with 16 CECs required for renewal.

Pilates Ring

See Magic Circle

Pilates Stance (Pilates V)

A position similar to first position in ballet but not as wide. Heels are together with toes slightly apart, forming a small "V" shape. Legs are straight but not locked, with slight external rotation from the hips. A neutral starting position for many exercises, particularly standing work and footwork series on the Reformer.

Piriformis

A deep hip rotator muscle running from the sacrum to the head of the femur. **The sciatic nerve runs beneath it**—when piriformis is tight, it can create sciatica-like symptoms ("piriformis syndrome").

The piriformis works together with and balances the psoas. When piriformis is weak relative to a strong psoas, it can become chronically fatigued and tight. People with piriformis syndrome, SIJ instability, or sciatic nerve pain often seek Pilates for support. Proper assessment of pelvic alignment, spine, and surrounding musculature is important before stretching.

Plank

A core-strengthening position where the body is held in a straight line from head to heels, similar to a push-up position. Can be performed on hands or forearms.

Plank builds core stability, shoulder strength, and full-body integration, forming part of exercises like Push-Up and Leg Pull Front. Cueing tips include "squeeze tennis balls at underarms," engage legs, and lift seat slightly to avoid arching lower back. Variations include Forearm Plank, Side Plank, Leg Pull Front, and Leg Pull Back.

Plantar Flexion

The movement of pointing the foot so the toes move away from the shins—opposite of **dorsiflexion**. Important in footwork, pointed-toe positions, and leg exercises, creating engagement through the calves.

Pole (Pilates Pole, Dowel)

A lightweight wooden or metal pole used as a prop for stretching, alignment feedback, and adding challenge. Held in hands during exercises like Spine Stretch, Roll Down, and overhead reach to provide feedback about arm and shoulder alignment.

Polestar Pilates

A major international Pilates education organization founded in **1992** by Dr. Brent Anderson (Doctor of Physical Therapy). Known for merging traditional Pilates with rehabilitation science.

The curriculum combines biomechanics, motor learning, communication skills, and modern research. Programs include Comprehensive (\$7,600, 497 hours), Mat (\$1,500), and Reformer (\$2,250), available in **40+ countries** and 12 languages. The philosophy emphasizes: "When you know the answers to the why's, you can really put people into the safest position."

Posterior

A position or movement near or toward the back of the body—opposite of **anterior**. "Posterior pelvic tilt" means tilting the pelvis so the pubic bone moves forward relative to the hip bones.

Posterolateral Breathing (Post-Lateral Breathing)

A specific Pilates breathing pattern where the entire ribcage expands, particularly toward the back (posterior) and sides (lateral), while maintaining some abdominal contraction during inhalation. This allows full lung capacity while maintaining core stability and spine stabilization. Considered **the hardest breathing technique to master**.

Posture

The position in which the body is held while standing, sitting, or moving. Proper alignment of the spine and body segments is fundamental to Pilates. Every Pilates exercise promotes proper posture through core engagement, spinal alignment, and balanced muscle development.

Power Pilates

A leading educator of classical Pilates teaching over **500 controlled, precise movements** designed to stretch and strengthen muscles without adding bulk. Built on Joseph Pilates' original methods, principles, and movements with modern teaching techniques.

Powerhouse

The term Joseph Pilates used for the musculature of the body's center—**the epicenter from which all movement emanates**. The Powerhouse includes the abdominals (especially transversus abdominis), pelvic floor, muscles surrounding the hip joint, lower back muscles, and back extensors.

The Powerhouse spans from the base of the ribs to the base of the buttocks—essentially the body's "corset." It is the source of power, stability, control, balance, and coordination in all Pilates movements. All energy arises from the Powerhouse and flows outward to the limbs.

Joseph Pilates was the first to realize the importance of deep inner abdominal muscles and pelvic floor—one of his major contributions to fitness. Cueing includes "navel to spine," "scoop," "corset," and "zip up."

Precision

One of the **six core principles** of Pilates emphasizing meticulous attention to detail, proper alignment, and exact technique in every movement.

Joseph Pilates said: "Each exercise has a specific purpose, placement, and technique." The focus is on quality of movement rather than quantity of repetitions. Every motion has a specific goal—precision ensures the intended muscles are engaged, correct alignment is maintained, and maximum benefit is achieved. Working with precision develops greater body awareness and control.

Pre-Pilates (Fundamental Exercises)

Preparatory exercises teaching fundamental Pilates principles before progressing to the classical repertoire. Includes exercises like Pelvic Curl, Ab Prep, Knee Fold, and Breast Stroke Prep. These establish core connection, proper breathing, neutral spine, and basic movement patterns.

Prenatal Pilates (Pregnancy Pilates)

Pilates exercises specifically designed or modified for pregnant practitioners, divided into prenatal (before birth) and postpartum (after birth) programs. Considerations include modifications for changing center of gravity, avoiding supine positions in later pregnancy, and supporting pelvic floor health.

Prone

A body position lying flat on the stomach with face down—opposite of **supine**. Starting position for extension exercises like Swan, Swan Dive, Swimming, Single Leg Kick, Double Leg Kick, and other back-strengthening movements.

Props

Smaller accessories used to modify, support, or add challenge to Pilates exercises. Include Pilates Ring (Magic Circle), foam roller, resistance bands, small balls (overballs), stability balls, and poles. Props provide proprioceptive feedback, increase resistance, offer support for injuries or limitations, and add variety to workouts.

Protraction

The movement of shoulder blades away from the spine and around the rib cage, widening the upper back and rounding shoulders forward. Primarily performed by serratus anterior and pectoralis minor. The opposite of

retraction. Understanding protraction/retraction helps with proper shoulder blade positioning.

Psoas (Iliopsoas)

A long, tubular hip flexor muscle connecting the lumbar spine to the femur by passing through the pelvis. Adjacent to the iliacus muscle (together called **iliopsoas**)—one of the most important core muscles.

The psoas is essential for hip flexion and spinal support. When properly activated, it works in harmony with the pelvic floor and core. When tight or weak, it can cause hip and back pain. The knee float teaches psoas activation—if the psoas doesn't engage properly, hip flexors and quadriceps compensate, creating chronic tightness.

The psoas complements and balances the piriformis. If psoas is strong but piriformis is weak, muscular imbalance results.

Push-Through (Push Through Exercise)

An exercise performed on the Cadillac/Tower using the Push-Through Bar. The bar is pushed forward from various starting positions while maintaining core control and spinal articulation. Benefits include shoulder stability, Powerhouse connection, chest opening, improved spinal articulation, and preparation for Teaser.

Push-Through Bar (Tower Bar)

A key component of the Cadillac/Trapeze Table—a horizontal bar (wooden or aluminum) connected to the frame by springs. Can be pushed or pulled, sprung from top or bottom. Available in 3-sided or 4-sided configurations with adjustable heights.

The Push-Through Bar is effective for arm and leg strength, spinal articulation, stretches, and seated/supine exercises. The seated Push-Through Bar helps find the ab/lat connection needed for Open Leg Rocker. Exercises include Teaser, Roll Down, breathing exercises, and Push Through from supine or seated positions.

Push-Up

The **final exercise (#34)** in Joseph Pilates' original Mat sequence. A full-body exercise working triceps, chest, and upper back.

Standing at back of mat, roll down through spine placing hands on mat, walk hands out in **four steps** to plank position, perform **3-5 tricep push-ups** (elbows toward ribs), then pike pelvis up, walk hands back, and roll up to standing. Key points: avoid sinking in shoulders and pelvis, maintain plank integrity, draw elbows into ribcage. Variations exist on Reformer and Wunda Chair, with modifications available with knees down.

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Monkey, Mountain Climber, Neck Pull, Neck Roll, Nodding, One Leg Circle, One Leg Kick, One Leg Stretch, Open Leg Rocker, Pelvic Clock, Pelvic Curl, Pelvic Tilt, Plank, Push-Through, Push-Up

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Anatomical Terms: Iliopsoas, Iliotibial Band, Intercostal Muscles, Kinetic Chain, Knee Extension/Flexion, Kyphosis, Latissimus Dorsi, Levator Scapulae, Ligaments, Lordosis, Lower Trapezius, Lumbar Spine, Midline, Multifidus, Nutation, Obliques, Paraspinals, Pelvic Floor, Piriformis, Plantar Flexion, Posterior, Prone, Protraction, Psoas

Principles and Concepts: Integration, Mind-Body Connection, Mindfulness, Mobility, Movement Principles, Neutral Pelvis, Neutral Spine, Opposition, Posture, Powerhouse, Precision

Cueing Language: Imprint, Inhale, Initiation, Knit the Ribs, Lengthen, Lift, Long Spine, Navel to Spine, Peel, Pilates Stance

Certification and Studio Terminology: Instructor Certification, ITTAP, Lagree Method, Layering, Lolita's Legacy, Mat Certification, Mat Pilates, Modification, NCPT, NPCP, Peak Pilates, Pilates Method Alliance, Polestar Pilates, Power Pilates, Pre-Pilates, Prenatal Pilates

Historical Figures: Jay Grimes, Joseph Hubertus Pilates, Kathy Grant, Lolita San Miguel, Mary Bowen, Clara Pilates

Props and Accessories: Jump Board, Kettlebell, Magic Circle, Overball, Pilates Ball, Pilates Ring, Pole, Props