



Bewildered by Pilates Options?

How to choose the Pilates that will benefit YOU most

Pilates seems to be offered in so many fitness and rehabilitation facilities now, it's very hard to know what's best for your needs. Everything, from the tiny movements of rehabilitation Pilates to the challenges of "extreme bootcamp Pilates", and hybrids such as Yogalates and Piloxing, seems to come under the same umbrella of Pilates. Is it really all Pilates? And how do you work out which is going to be best for you?

The fact is that Pilates has a massive range and repertoire of exercises which is why, done well, it *can* be all these things *but* here is the bottom line on *all* Pilates. What separates Pilates from just "doing exercises" is that it is underpinned by a set of good movement principles, correct alignment cues and fundamental movements. It is the mastery of these, not just the exercises in themselves, that brings about positive change in the body. If you don't get these principles and fundamentals into your body, Pilates will not confer the benefits you are hoping for. A good teacher should constantly be reinforcing and insisting upon these principles, particularly precision - one of Pilates' key movement principles - otherwise you most likely will not get the most from your workout.

So what is best for you if your GP says "Do pilates for your bad back" or your friend says "I want a flat stomach, let's try Pilates". Where do you fit on the Pilates spectrum?

A general rule of thumb is – if you are in pain or have a history of injury, investing in a few private sessions will make a world of difference. If you are doing Pilates for fitness, don't rush to move on from the beginners' class before you have a good grasp of the principles. Whatever your level, try to attend classes with a small number of people in them so you get as much attention as possible.

1. If you have a specific injury or have had surgery

Hopefully you'll be on a straight road to recovery. Your physiotherapist may start you on simple Pilates exercises and then refer you on to a Pilates practitioner with rehabilitation experience to work with you one-to-one as a bridge to getting into a regular Pilates class.

2. If you have long-term or recurring pain, for example in the neck, back or hip

You may have episodes of pain or have “always had a dodgy back”. It may clear up in the short-term only to return months later. These problems are often more challenging to resolve. The original problem is often compounded by compensatory movement or holding patterns which can in themselves cause pain. This is where an experienced, comprehensively-trained Pilates teacher with a good eye and a good understanding of movement can really help. Work one-to-one so that they can focus on unpicking the complexities of your problem.

3. If you've acquired a few injuries over the years but it's nothing serious or current

Take a couple of one on one sessions if you can just in case you are holding on to faulty movement patterns that you can address. Reinforce that knowledge then by attending some beginners' classes.

4. If you are fit and well

Do a few sessions in a beginners' class before moving on to a regular class. Don't be tempted to shortcut this process otherwise you'll miss the depth of the work. Also you'll be surprised at what you learn about the way you are currently moving and how to improve it in a beginners' programme.

5. If you are very fit or an athlete looking to improve your performance

Invest in a few private sessions so you can grasp the principles and get a tailored Pilates programme. The principles of good healthy movement are beneficial at any level of performance. Mastering these may be enough to improve your form. The tailored exercises will also enhance your performance. You might also consider joining a regular class to bring balance to your body, something that your chosen sport doesn't always do!

6. If you are interested in trying the Pilates equipment such as the reformer

All the same Pilates principles apply here but with a reformer you'll be using spring-loaded equipment. Try to do some one on one or duet sessions to familiarize yourself with both the principles and some of the basic exercises. Choose the smallest group class size you can afford as getting plenty of your teacher's attention is vital to getting the most out of the equipment work.

If you'd like more information on the benefits of Pilates, please [click here](#)



Sarah Woodhouse is a Pilates teacher, teacher-trainer and international presenter of 16 years experience and has run successful practices in Hong Kong and Melbourne. She has had considerable experience in working with those with long-term and recurrent pain.