



March MATness- Move Well Every Day

Home Exercises Week 1

When starting your Pilates practice at home, it's important to take a moment to ground yourself, and "get your mind into your body." A great way to begin your practice is to take a few minutes to breathe properly.

I. Breathe

Lie on your mat with knees bent, feet in alignment with sit bones; make sure you are in neutral spine, i.e. natural curve in lumbar spine, hip flexors soft.

1) Concentrate on breathing W-I-D-E into the ribcage so ribs open out to the side (not puff up to the ceiling) on inhale. Feel the ribs expand into the floor below you as you inhale. On the exhale, try to funnel your ribs down towards the navel without causing undue stress to rise in the throat or neck and without shifting the pelvis. It may be helpful to place hands on ribs to facilitate this action and/or to place a small towel in the lumbar curve to maintain neutral spine during the exercise. This lateral breath is used throughout all Pilates exercises.

2) Now focus on the lower abdominals, specifically the pelvic floor and the TA (transversus abdominus). In addition to funneling the ribs on the exhale, now try to use that deep breath to pull the lower abs flat and wide across the hip bones. Think of smiling across your low waist, or of pulling a seatbelt low across your lap. Be patient – this muscle can take a while to find. Some people find the TA more easily if they start by activating the pelvic floor muscles; it can be helpful to have a small flexible ball or sponge to squeeze between the knees. Be careful not to pull the pelvis into posterior pelvic tilt (thus imprinting the spine on the mat) as you do this exercise.

II. Contract – Abdominals



3) Chest Lifts. Still lying on back with knees bent, fingers interlaced, hands clasped behind head. Exhale and roll the head neck and shoulders are off the mat; gaze should be directed at the knees and the ribcage area should be deeply contracted. Inhale to roll back down. Shoulders should slide away from the ears on the rollup, and elbows should be out to the side. A small ball can be squeezed between the knees to activate pelvic floor. Repeat 8x

As a further progression, add oblique twist. The ribcage rotates to the right and left (a “spiraling” action across the center line of the body – not a side bend) at the top of the chest lift. Pelvic stability is the key for this exercise to be effective. Repeat 8 sets.



4) Full Roll Up. assisted with Theraband if necessary. Lie flat on the mat with Theraband around soles of the feet. Knees may be slightly bent. Wrap ends of Theraband around hands and draw back until taught, creating resistance. Roll up, utilizing the Theraband’s resistance to allow proper activation of the TA on the way up. Lengthen the spine at the top of the roll up, and stretch forward over the legs. Sit up tall and draw back on the Theraband, again creating resistance as you roll down the spine until flat on the mat. If no Theraband is used, perform the exercise with arms extended overhead, in alignment with the ears.



5) The 100’s. The 100’s teaches proper activation of core muscles, specifically the transversus abdominus (TA), and proper breathing techniques. Begin lying on the mat with knees bent, heels in alignment with the sit bones, arms long by your sides. Roll head neck and shoulders up on exhale, lifting fingers approx. 4 inches off mat; keep the gaze on the knees. Take a deep inhalation through the nose for five counts, then a full exhalation through the mouth for 5 counts; the arms pump down to the floor once for each count; avoid moving the head and upper spine as the arms pump. 10 sets of 10 breath counts are performed. To progress, lift legs up to 90° angle at hip and knee; for the full version, extend legs out on the diagonal with slight external rotation from the hip. Be sure to maintain a proper TA connection, pulling the lower abs flat and wide across the pelvis and avoid over-activating the rectus abdominus (RA), causing a bulge to rise in the stomach area.



6) Single Straight Leg Stretch (Scissors) & Criss Cross.

Lie on your back and extend the right leg up to the ceiling. Roll head neck and shoulders up and hold behind the right hamstring, calf or ankle (depending on your flexibility); float the straight left leg a few inches off the mat. Exhale and pulse the right leg towards your nose twice keeping your gaze on the navel. Take a big inhale as you change sides, exhaling twice as you pulse the left leg. Each time you repeat, try to deepen the hamstring stretch (8x). Now bend the right knee and interlace fingers behind the head rotating the upper torso towards the right to move into Criss Cross. Keep the shoulder blades off the mat and exhale deeply. Inhale as you come through center to change sides, exhaling deeply as you rotate to the left to activate the obliques. Repeat 8x.



7) Double Leg Stretch.

Lie on your back and roll head neck and shoulders up as you hug knees to the chest. Inhale deeply and extend fingers and toes up to the ceiling, keeping your gaze on the navel. Exhale as you reach away with the arms and legs, deeply activating the core to stabilize the pelvis. Circle arms around and bend knees, hugging them once again to the chest. The head neck and shoulders never drop in height off the mat. Repeat 8x.

III. Stabilize -Supine



8) Femur Arcs.

Lie on back with legs lifted up into a tabletop position; gently imprint the spine into the mat. Alternate dipping the toes towards the mat. Limit your range of motion to the point where you can stabilize the pelvis completely. Repeat at least 6 sets.



9) Diamond Toe Dips. Same set-up as Femur Arcs, but when legs are lifted into tabletop, take the big toes together and turn knees out to the side so legs make a diamond shape. Toes should arc away from nose. Dip toes down towards mat on exhale and inhale legs back up to starting position. Repeat at least 6 sets.

For 8 and 9 above, it is very important that the back doesn't arch away from the mat, nor should the pelvis move. Your deep core muscles should be contracted to prevent any spinal or pelvic movement; the only thing happening is a hinging of the thighs. Hands may be placed palm down under the lower ribs while performing these movements; keep an even, firm pressure on the hands with the ribs as the legs dip down. You can "self correct" this way.

IV. Articulate



10) Bridging.

Lie on back, knees bent, feet in parallel; curl pelvis off the mat, and roll up the spine one vertebra at a time. Roll only to between the shoulder blades, no higher, being careful to keep abdominals engaged and ribs funneling. Repeat approx 6 times. Then perform single leg bridges (keeping pelvis even), 6 each on the left and right legs.



11) Swan.

Lying prone (on stomach) with hands placed slightly ahead of shoulders, arms bent in goal post position. Lift abdominals off mat and lengthen tailbone towards heels. Press your thoracic spine up to extension; maintain length in lumbar spine. Use your breath to contract abs and think of eccentrically lengthening your internal obliques. 8-10x

To modify - You can also take thoracic extension with hands stacked under forehead. Glue hands to forehead and using your own upper back strength, lift the upper body slightly off the mat. Be sure not to lift chin too high and put neck into hyperextension. 8-10x

V. Stabilize - Prone



12) Swimming.

Still prone, now extend arms on the mat overhead. Feel yourself stretching out on an X of opposite arms and legs. Keep tailbone lengthening towards the heels. Lift head, neck, shoulders and upper back slightly into extension. Now lift opposite arm and leg off floor. Stretch. Change sides. Stretch. Start to gather speed with this movement pattern until you are always off the ground with the arms and legs, and "swimming" rhythmically. Sniff inhale, inhale, exhale, exhale. The key point is pelvic and spinal stability. Feel your hip bones evenly pressing into mat, and visualize your spine hovering like a straight line above the mat. 8-10x



13) Glute squeeze.

Turn knees out to side (bend knees to 90 degrees) and press heels together. Lift soles of feet up to ceiling as if lifting a tray). Repeat 8x

Push back into Child's Pose to stretch back.

VI. Burn – Side Lying Series

Lying on side, prop yourself up onto your forearm, or place elbow under shoulder and balance on side of hip; and obliques contracted, lifting waist away from the floor. Do not move hips or ribs at any time during these exercises



14) Double Leg lifts.

Keep legs glued together in parallel; lift both legs to hip height to contract external obliques.



15) Single Leg Lifts into Circles.

Lift top leg up to hip height; on the last one, hold the leg up and perform small leg circles, keeping pelvis still.



16) Arabesque Lifts.

Now angle top leg to the back and pulse up and down.

Repeat at least 8-10 reps of each exercise.

Stretch buttock by lying on back with ankle crossed over knee. Repeat entire sequence on the other side.