



Pilates for the Equestrian

Create a deeper seat and an ideal riding partnership with your horse.

- Frustrated that your horse won't respond properly to your commands?
- Having trouble keeping a stable seat?
- Feeling unusually sore and tired after a ride?

Imbalances develop over time, based on physiology, posture and lifestyle. How you move when not riding – other types of exercise, the amount (and quality) of sitting you do at work, etc. – directly affects how you function on a horse. Resulting asymmetries greatly affect movement and alignment, resulting in impediments like:

- Rounded shoulders
- Tightness and curving in the lower back
- Tight hamstrings





Why Pilates?

Pilates exercises increase your body awareness, and improve flexibility, balance, and strength in order to facilitate an optimal riding experience. Pilates helps equestrians:

- Lengthen the spine and strengthen the core, which stabilizes the body in movement
- Sculpt a stronger body with increased flexibility, strength, and balance
- Create a deeper seat and enhance the suppleness of the lower back
- Strengthen the abdominals
- Increase hip independence
- Increase leg and body length

Performance Benefits

With a strong core and increased flexibility, riders can:

- Freely and gently move arms and legs around a stable base
- Help clarify aids and hold jumping form
- Avoid collapsing and bouncing in the saddle
- Better absorb a horse's movement
- Improve posture to help you deepen your seat
- Increase comfort during and after your ride
- Maintain neutral pelvis so you can easily follow your horse's movements
- Develop a trusting riding relationship, where your horse responds to your commands and is confident in your ability



Pilates for the Equestrian - Featured Exercises

Create a deeper seat and an ideal riding partnership with your horse.

Featured Mat Exercise

This Month: Single Leg Stretch

Benefit: Spinal flexibility helps prevent rigid posture and allows you sit up tall while in the saddle. Increased core and back strength prevents slouching and leaning the body too far forward, and keeps your body relaxed.

Starting position

Sit on mat with both legs pulled into chest. Place inside hand on knee and outside hand on ankle and roll down with control as the free leg straightens. Keep leg at a height that allows lower back to remain on mat. Keep head up.

Movement sequence

Exhale - Release leg held into chest, straighten it out below you and pull other leg in. Sink abdominals as you bring leg in, keep elbows wide and back steady.



Inhale - Switch legs.



Challenges

To challenge abdominals, draw leg in only until it forms a right angle with hip and place hands lightly on leg rather than pulling it in toward body.

Optimum form

Keep torso as still as possible, head supported with a minimum of strain, and legs level with eyes.

Reminders

- Keep shoulders down and the elbows wide.
- Keep your torso still. Imagine you are holding a glass of your favorite beverage on your abdomen and don't spill it.
- Pull abdominals deeper in with every repetition. Don't let the abdominals rise!

Precautions

For neck and shoulder injuries: Support the head, neck and upper body with a C-shaper, wedge pillow or towels and work the lower body only.

For low back injuries: Work with an imprinted spine or use a supported neutral position of the low back.

Avoid with osteoporosis.



Featured Reformer Exercise

This Month: Feet in Straps

Benefit: Create a more independent, deeper seat by:

- Increasing pelvic stability and strengthening abdominals
- Strengthening hamstrings, adductors, deep hip external rotators, gluteus maximus, hip abductors
- Increasing flexibility of the hamstrings, adductors and hip flexors
- Developing balance in the hip musculature.

Equipment setup:

Springs: 2

Footbar Position: Any bar

Straps: Regular

Prerequisites: Adequate hamstring flexibility, ability to stabilize the back, Hundreds on the mat

Starting position

Lie supine on carriage with head between shoulder rests, and straps on arches of feet. Lower legs to approximately 45 degrees of hip flexion.

The exercise

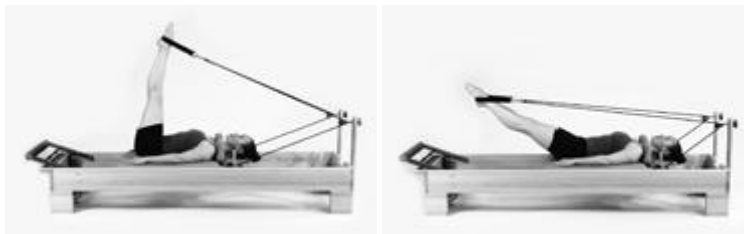
- Exhale and engage abdominals to stabilize back and start exercise.
- Maintain position of back and pelvis throughout movement.
- Inhale to return legs to starting position.



Positions

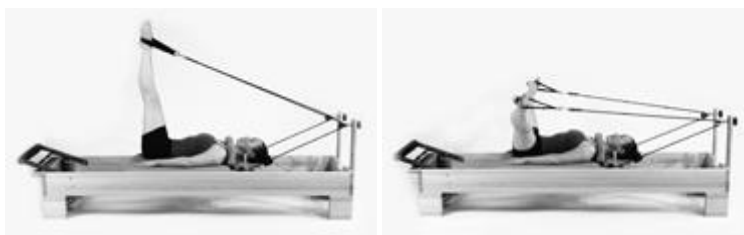
Leg Lowers: With pelvis stable and inner thighs together, lower and raise legs.

- Leg positions - Parallel, turned out or turned in.
- Variations – Place a Pilates ring or ball between ankles to increase adductor work.



Scissors: With pelvis stable and inner thighs together, open legs out to sides and return.

- Leg positions - Legs stay over hips and carriage stays steady.
- Legs move down toward bar as if drawing a "V". Carriage will move.



Circles: With pelvis stable and inner thighs together, move legs down, open legs out to sides and circle them around to starting position. Do 6 to 10 circles in each direction.

- Leg positions - Parallel, turned out or turned in.
- Place straps around knees to warm up hips and decrease the challenge.





Frogs: With the pelvis stable, the legs turned out, the knees bent and the feet together, raise and lower the legs.

- **Breaststroke:** From frog position, straighten legs into a "V", bring inner thighs together and bend knees to start again. Reverse direction.



Stretches

Hamstring: Place one ankle in strap and opposite leg on footbar. Straighten leg in strap to stretch hamstring. Straighten leg on footbar to decrease stretch.



Adductor: Place both arches in straps and open legs to stretch adductors.



Hamstring and Psoas: Place one ankle in strap and straighten leg to stretch hamstring.





Reminders

- Engage abdominals before legs lower, and keep them engaged.
- Scoop abdominals to begin and don't let them pop as legs lower.
- Lower legs only as far as back can stay stable throughout exercise.
- Monitor low back position with hands.
- Move legs symmetrically.

Precautions

For low back and sacroiliac joint problems: Make sure low back is not changing positions as legs move. Support low back in a neutral position with a towel. Limit range of motion as legs lower. Avoid if symptoms increase.

For hip flexor injuries and arthritis: Work only in a range of motion that does not increase symptoms. Work with knees rather than feet in straps to decrease load on hips, or avoid if symptoms increase.

For limited hamstring flexibility: In order to avoid stress on low back, hamstring flexibility needs to be great enough to allow back to stay stable as legs move to approximately 65 degrees of hip flexion.





Suggested products for runners

Pilates Allegro® Reformer

The Allegro is the most versatile Reformer in the world, with over 26,750 in use. Tough, durable, yet portable and storable. You can fold it flat, stack it, or store it vertically. At just 48kgs, some teams wouldn't think of going on the road without it. No other equipment offers as much flexibility. Rolls, stacks and stores on end.

The Allegro expands with the Tower of Power to be a reformer, half-trapeze and a mat, all in one compact footprint that allows an extraordinary range of programming. Start with the full system, or with Allegro® Reformers you can add to later. It all retrofits!





Studio Reformer®

The smoothest, quietest ride on the market. Balanced Body's Pilates Studio Reformer® sets the standard in comfort and craftsmanship. With every edge sculpted and smooth, the Studio Reformer has sleek, clean lines-appealing to the eye and inviting to the touch.

For 30 years, the world's most respected Pilates instructors have used and recommended the Balanced Body® Pilates Studio Reformer. Built of solid Rock Maple, our Studio Reformer is the most smooth, quiet and durable machine on the market. Reformers we built 20 years ago are still hard at work today.





Pilates IQ® Reformer

The Pilates IQ® sets up in seconds, then stores away under a bed or upright in a closet. With its sleek design, professional features, easy storability, and affordable price, the Pilates IQ is perfect for home. This is the *only* reformer available that shortens for storage and still provides a smooth carriage ride with no seams on the track! Comes with free workout video or DVD. 2-year warranty for non-commercial use.



Mats, Props and Accessories

Balanced Body® offers a complete array of top-quality accessories. For products listed here, Pilates workout videos / DVDs and books are available to help expand your exercise repertoire.

- Ultra-Fit Circle® and Flex Ring Toner®
- Mats, Foam Rollers and Fit Balls
- Balance Boards and Rotator Discs
- Exercise Bands
- Reformer Foot Plates / Jumpboards





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