

# The 8 Principles of Pilates

8/30/2021

Several years ago I had the honor of presenting to the students in the **Texas State Physical Therapy** doctoral program. They were curious how Pilates might help their physical therapy patients recover more quickly and holistically. The course content I put together educated them on how **Pilates** can dovetail with physical therapy as a tool for neuromuscular re-education, enhanced movement, improved athletic performance and injury prevention.

Then, the course became so popular that I had the pleasure of presenting again. This time I focused on how **the eight principles of Pilates** create a unique relationship between physical therapy and Pilates as well as how Pilates has evolved to:

- become a preventative practice that corrects posture and alignment issues for better quality of movement
  - provide a pre-habilitation system to strengthen patients prior to surgical intervention
  - provide a continuum of care following PT for rehabilitation
  - be a viable athletic cross-training system for injury prevention and improved athletic performance
  - create more refined and stronger response of nerve firing between the brain and body due to the precise nature of the movement
-

# What are the 8 Pilates Movement Principles?



## 1. **Concentration**

First, the principle of concentration in Pilates fosters awareness of the entire body while performing movement. It is required to decrease undesired movement patterns and is an essential element in connecting the mind and body. Increasing concentration during movement strengthens not only the primary muscles, but the stabilizers and postural muscles as well. This improved movement skill, athletic performance, and longevity of movement abilities.

## 2. **Control**

With control in Pilates, we emphasize quality over quantity. Clients who complete physical therapy without learning movement technique are likely to experience the same injury again, or new injuries. This is a result of movement compensations, which means changing how you move. We do this to avoid hurting the injured area further after developing an injury. This can make the problem worse or set us up for additional injuries. Integrated muscular control is the foundation for Pilates movement and is an excellent post-therapy continuum of care to equip clients with a new movement vocabulary—and movement control—to avoid these discouraging (and expensive!) problems.

### 3. Balanced Muscle Development



**Muscle balance** in Pilates is the harmonious action where muscles work together to keep the bones and joints aligned. This encourages efficient movement and proper joint mechanics and enhances postural alignment. Balanced muscle development also prevents both over- and under- use of muscles contributing to a reduction of injury and pain. This Pilates principle produces a well formed body with integrated strength and symmetry of movement.

### 4. Centering

Many people think the Pilates principle of Centering is the concept of calming down and “centering” oneself before movement. This is not correct. **Centering as a Pilates movement principle** is the idea that all movement originates from the center (powerhouse) of the body and moves outward through the extremities.

Centering results in coordinated, controlled movement as well as improved posture, and a leaner, longer torso. The “center” includes the abdomen, buttocks, inner thighs and lower back. “Centering” helps us learn to mindfully recruit vital core, stability and postural muscles, such as the pelvic floor, transversus abdominis, and multifidus (a deep stabilizing muscle of the back).

## 5. Whole Body Movement



This principle distinguishes Pilates from other disciplines bringing the focus much more to the muscles that stabilize and work together (called synergist muscles) as opposed to the primary movers. The result is uniformly developed muscles that are necessary for posture, suppleness and graceful movement. Whole body means no isolation of muscle groups.

## 6. Rhythm/Flow

The rhythm of Pilates does not contain static or isolated movement and is often called flow or fluidity. This principle emphasizes grace over speed and promotes efficiency and control through greater range of motion. The Pilates repertoire ranges from fundamental, education-based movement to – as competency increases – rigorous, athletic conditioning. Participants are challenged to ingrain their enhanced skills into rhythmic, fluid and complex movements.

## 7. Breath

This principle is an integral part of overall body functioning. Breathing, as in all great practices, is where the work starts, flows from, and ends. Pilates lateral breath helps to increase VO2 max, improves the circulatory system and, most importantly, facilitates controlled movement and mind-body connection. Quality breathing offloads carbon dioxide more effectively and feeds the brain and the body the needed oxygen for required optimal functioning. Mindful breathing also invigorates and rejuvenates the body and enhances a sense of calm and well-being. You can read this post here about proper breath control with [lateral breathing](#).

## 8. Precision

The last of the 8 principles of Pilates is precision. Practicing this principle results in appropriate muscle activation. Precision requires continued focus and repetition to help ingrain new movement patterns on a subconscious level. It enhances articulate, purposeful, coordinated movement. The emphasis on detail and origin of movement produces desired results, reduces or eliminates pain and prevents injury.

The continued integration of these eight Pilates principles serves to educate physical therapy patients and/or Pilates students on the integrity of and need for quality, precise movement. They learn to improve their posture and alignment for more efficient movement. They retrain their bodies by eliminating compensatory movements. Using these mindful principles they build the brain/body neural connections needed to stay healthy and fit, achieve the results they want, and lead more fulfilled, injury-free lives.