

Pilates and your Personal Best



By Anita Ivic, Imprint Pilates

Whether you're a walker, jogger, full marathon runner, a triathlete, a tennis player, or just your average exerciser, achieving your Personal Best is the ultimate goal. No matter how well prepared people are, few can sustain their best performance on their own (The New Yorker- Atul Gawande).

Pilates is a system of exercises designed to improve physical strength, flexibility, posture, while core conditioning, and also enhance mental awareness in order to support efficient movement. Incorporating Pilates as strength training into your program can help you achieve your personal best.

Pilates

The classical Pilates Method is based on exercises founded by Joseph Pilates during WWII and seeks to develop controlled movements from a strong core and it does this using a range of exercises to guide and train the body.

Modern contemporary methods and those taught at Imprint Pilates, such as the Stott Pilates Method is based on 5 key principles:

1. Breathing
2. Pelvic placement
3. Ribcage placement
4. Scapula movement
5. Head and cervical spine placement.



Through a series of controlled and often small movements on a mat or equipment, stabilizing muscles are recruited to develop the required strength. It's amazing to see a wide range of students; including athletes attend introductory sessions, recruiting correct muscles for the first time to realize how 'weak and shaky' they are.

Physical Strength & Flexibility

Running, as I'm sure you're all aware involves the utilization of large power generating muscles, which propel the body forward to generate speed, power and they sustain substantial aerobic effort for long durations of time. The utilization of these muscles, and their ability to push the body for long periods of time at high speeds, is increased when the skeleton is stable.

Pilates exercises target all the parts of the body. Often we think of Pilates as only working the abdominal muscles. Abdominal strengthening however is only a small component of Pilates as it also targets hips, knees, ankles and other body parts to ensure the joints are in a proper position to transfer the forces that the body experiences during running, cycling, cross country skiing or any other physical activity. (cont..)

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Physical Strength & Flexibility (..cont)

Pilates concentrates on strengthening stabilizing muscles, including the core and is often overlooked by many athletes. Strong core muscles, comprised of all abdominals (external and internal obliques, transversus abdominis, rectus abdominis) and back muscles allow efficient power transfer from the legs through the rest of your body. In contrast, with a weak core the small stabilizing muscles are not strong enough to hold the spine in correct alignment. The large muscles try to align and support the skeleton which decreases biomechanical efficiency. This in turn can slow the runner down, decrease their endurance and aerobic capacity or over time can lead to repetitive strain or chronic injuries.

If these small muscles, which Pilates exercises target and strengthen, can do their job properly then the large muscles will be able to generate the power and speed without interference.

Posture & Gait - Injury Prevention & Rehabilitation

The Stabilizing muscles that Pilates strengthens are also responsible for maintaining correct posture. When muscles fire incorrectly (because of injury, laziness or other environmental factors), they place unnecessary strain on the surrounding muscles, posture deteriorates and can result in pain. The same rings true for your running gait, if stabilizing muscles aren't doing their job correctly, something can and probably will go 'wrong' at some point.

I have many clients with really simple problems, they come in looking for help, with chronic back, knee, hip, shoulder and foot pains, you name it, we've had it! Pilates was developed as a rehabilitative form of exercise, and through an initial postural assessment we help diagnose the problem often together with our onsite physiotherapist. The diagnosis, more often than not is that the pains are a direct result of incorrect core or other stabilizing muscle recruitment, throwing the rest of the body into a state of imbalance.

Lower back pain is amongst one of the most common complaints from many runners, cyclists or triathletes from lack of support of the weak abdominal muscles. Our programs focus on correcting muscle activation, releasing contracted muscles, articulating the spine; joints while core conditioning and stabilizing the muscles that craft the biomechanical efficient power house.

It's astounding to see the results and responses from clients after just 3- 5 sessions. It's not uncommon to hear "That's it? It's as simple as that" and really it is, it's that simple, ok, well not quite. Being able to locate and develop a plan to recruit those muscles effectively however, is not an easy task!

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Mental Awareness

Increasing mental awareness is a benefit many people don't necessarily associate with Pilates or any other part of their training program. Have you ever tried to specifically recruit a single muscle? Conditioning small stabilizing muscles require much more mental attention than traditional strength training, exercises should be completed consciously and mindfully and are as important as strengthening the power muscles. It's a skill which requires a lot of physical, mental effort and in some sense can be more challenging than running.

Developing this mental awareness improves the mind-body connection to a level where the athlete becomes consciously aware of his / her body, what muscles are being used and having the ability to modify form & gait accordingly without intervention. Being able to consciously engage core musculature or any muscle for that matter, especially towards the end of your long runs or races will improve your biomechanics efficiency as well as reducing any pain.

Building an increased self-awareness, knowing how your body feels and responding to its needs is a vital tool in achieving your personal best, physically and mentally.

Imprint Pilates

At Imprint Pilates we specialize in private and Semi-Private classes aimed at integrating individualized training programs to support your goals. A Pilates program is the perfect runners / cyclists cross-training activity, helping to complete a strong, supple and injury free body.

We focus directly on your individual goals and desires, and you will see and feel the results immediately. We are equally dedicated to providing clear and detailed instruction, and to support your journey, whether you are a beginner or well - seasoned practitioner. As your body changes, your instructor will be there to modify and advance your workout to meet your changing needs. You will correct posture, strengthen muscle weaknesses and imbalances, relieve tension, and strengthen your core. Your body will be pain free, strong and flexible.

To schedule an introductory session and start your strength training e-mail anita@imprintpilates.com or call 416 939 9545.