

Pilates developed by a man for men – even All Blacks

By Carol Westmorland champion cyclist and Pilates instructor



Joseph Pilates developed his system of exercises for men. Men make up about 20 per cent of all those attending my Pilates classes.

I really enjoy teaching men they are not afraid to acknowledge when work needs to be done. They also seem interested in the mechanics of the Pilates method and bring along a good dose of humour which is something I actively encourage.

Pilates works as a form of exercise because it develops core or inner strength and returns ailing posture to its condition before bad habits took hold. The men I teach acknowledge the need to correct misaligned muscles caused by years of sport or too long behind a desk. Their postural issues may come from a different arena to women but the remedy is the same.

According to Dr Tom Crisp, a sports and orthopaedic specialist at BUPA Wellness, the best way for men to improve posture and develop muscle strength is to target the body's core muscles – those around the trunk area.

Dr Tom Crisp says: "The core muscles that fitness fanatics keep talking about act like a corset around your trunk, take pressure off your back and pull all the other abdominal muscles



Two can do it: Carol Westmorland and husband Keith Mitchel

into the right place."

A browse through *Men's Health* and it quickly becomes apparent that the core muscles which Pilates targets so perfectly can help alleviate back problems and help develop a flat stomach – the two things at the top of many a man's health and fitness 'to do' list. Most of my classes are mixed and because of demand I am tempted to offer some 'men only' classes. Not because the exercises would be any different but because I still think there are many men out there who are less confident yet would benefit enormously.

Pilates is incorporated into the New Zealand All Blacks weekly training schedule to strengthen their core, improve their mobility and to help prevent injuries. Joseph Pilates himself

was a boxer and self-defence instructor and the legendary German heavyweight boxer, Max Schmelling, was a regular at his New York studio.

Pilates strengthens the muscles around the joints to stabilise the body, allowing a full range of movement and balance. It corrects imbalances within the body by strengthening weak areas and lengthening tight muscles. Once you understand the principles of Pilates you can start to challenge yourself more by adding the weight of your body as resistance. Slow and controlled movement works best.

It's been a training vehicle for elite male athletes for over 50 years. Premier League footballers and the England cricket team are also devotees. Men have also figured prominently as



Go for it: Keith Mitchel

instructors and promoters of the Pilates method throughout its history. I am now into my tenth year of teaching Pilates and during my initial training I met only male teachers. Fifteen years ago I trained to become an exercise to movement teacher and at that time the training was dominated by females.

Pilates concentrates its movements from the centre of the body; the powerhouse. This kind of core training makes Pilates an excellent technique for whole-body fitness, as well as a foundation for cross training with other kinds of sports and exercise something men understand. Once a movement is mastered it is about retaining its quality and I think that logic works with the male psyche.

Increasing flexibility is a goal

that Pilates addresses in a way that men often feel comfortable with. Pilates works toward functional fitness. That is, the ability to have the strength, balance, and flexibility that allows you to move through daily-life and sport with ease. Something I can testify to when cycling hundreds of miles. To this end Pilates exercises seek to increase flexibility and a range of motion without resorting to gymnastic stretches.

There is nothing specifically different about Pilates training for men. The Pilates method is the same for all. Men might find that their muscles are a little tighter, especially in the hips and hamstrings, but exercises can be easily modified to allow those areas to stretch out gradually. Modification of exercises is commonplace in pilates.

Pilates is a body-mind practice where part of the exercise is to bring attention to every movement. Similarly, exacting alignment and core training that goes beyond the superficial muscles require more subtle attention and small adjustment than some men are used to finding in an exercise class. It is a less is more approach.

Over time it makes perfect sense. It is actually a very simple principle to follow but initially as one male participant reasoned it was like hearing a really good joke then trying to repeat it back. Not a bad analogy. Like all good things practice makes perfect and frequency leads to skill.

A 'New Year' a 'New You' or at the very least a Pilates book for Christmas.

Sea-kayaking in winter's a breeze - if you like force six winds!

SEPTEMBER is a lovely time to go sea-kayaking; November isn't. It stands to reason, doesn't it? Yet when I was offered, in September, the chance to join some colleagues on a sea-kayaking trip off Anglesey, in November, the late summer sun lulled me into saying 'yes' without giving it much more thought. But eight weeks is a long time in British weather...

Fast forward eight weeks and I'm looking out of my hotel window in north Wales at a very choppy Trearddur Bay.

Ten of us from the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild had signed up for the sea-kayaking, but slowly other people looked out of their windows too and decided against it.

Guidebook writer Vivienne Crow shares her love of the great outdoors



We were left with four brave souls and the guide, Huw.

"I think we'll just mess about in the bay today," said Huw, eyeing up his motley crew of nervous-looking paddlers. "We won't attempt the open sea."

But "messing about in the bay" is easier said than done when the wind is force five, gusting force six.

I launched myself from the beach and paddled with all my might to get beyond the breaking waves. It was hard work against that wind and, taking a five-second breather, I found myself

washed back up on the beach again.

My friend Chris was faring even worse. Every time it looked like he might finally be getting somewhere, a huge roller would come and tip him over. Up he'd come spluttering, shivering and cursing.

Reu was having the same problem as me, but instead of ending up beached every time, he was being smashed against the rocks.

Finally giving up, the three of us lined up along the beach and watched while our one remaining companion managed 15 minutes of paddling before joining us in dripping defeat.

"We're not getting very far, are we?" said Huw, using his keen

observation skills. "I think we'll head to the Inland Sea."

Inland Sea? That sounds a bit... well, gentler...

Two hours later and we were all totally exhausted from battling the wind, and the exertion was no longer keeping us warm; the shivers had set in.

Coming to the end of our ordeal, it was time to shoot the small weir that connected the "Inland Sea" to the real McCoy.

Exhausted, cold and unwilling to end up in the rapids, I went down rafted up to Huw's boat.

It was a doddle!

So, what of next November's annual gathering? Well, I'm pleased to say that it's going to be in Warwickshire so I won't be tempted by the sea-kayaking...

