



Marilyn Miller

PLUGGED INTO PILATES

BY MARCIA RUDY

Pilates. Pilates. Pilates. What is this mystical force in the gymnastic universe?

Ask Marilyn Miller, owner-director of Pilates On Hudson in Peekskill, and she'll tell you that if you are looking for a place to burn some of those holiday calories, Pilates On Hudson might be just the place to do it.

"While many fitness centers focus on high-end aerobics, for a lot of people this just isn't realistic, especially if you're over a certain age," Miller said.

"Pilates aims at efficiency of movement. It's a flowing movement outward from a strong core. The exercises flow into each other in order to create strength and stamina. It's a little like ballet," said Miller, herself a former ballet dancer. "It concentrates on the deep muscles of the spine and what we call the core muscles, the transverse abdominals which originate from and wrap around the spine."

With the aid of Pilates equipment, small weights, and other small props, Miller tailors the exercises to the needs of each client. She interviews and performs a postural analysis on each client and conducts strength-training tests to determine the accurate starting point for a conditioning program. She also develops conditioning charts for the clients.

"Most studies related to exercise and weight loss focus on running, but fail to realize that many people, especially those over 50, may not be able to run. And since many fitness centers focus on upright ambulatory types of exercise, people think that there is nothing they can do. This is where Pilates can come into play. Originally developed in the early 20th century by Joseph Pilates as a form of rehabilitation for soldiers in WWI, the program is beneficial to the 50-and-over age group in that many of the exercises can be done without undue strain on the knees or back. In fact, studies show that Pilates exercises done on the Pilates equipment can reduce back pain," Miller said.

"All of the exercises whether they are on mats or with the equipment take strengthening to a greater level. The equipment also offers more options for people who are extremely 'deconditioned' (out of shape) because the mat work can be largely focused on core muscles which are very weak. Not surprisingly, resistance training on Pilates equipment is more beneficial for older adults because there is less strain on their tendons and ligaments as they initiate any movement... The reason is the resistance of the spring. The Pilates equipment provides a constant resistance as opposed to the weight in any gym machine. The constant force exists because with the spring, the more you pull, the greater the resistance. With a weight, the more you pull the resistance remains the same," explained Miller.

"Many people think you have to be a dancer or gymnast to do Pilates. A lot of people will say to me, 'Before I see you, I need to get in shape,' when in fact this is the best way for them to get in shape."

This is a system for all generations. Miller recently taught a family that ranged in ages from 4 to 40, a mother and three children.

"In some ways it was easier for the 4-year-old than the 40-year-old," said Miller. "While the 4-year-old did not have the strength to do what her mom did, she certainly had the flexibility. If she needed to bring her knees to her chest, she brought her knees to her chest."

The flexibility demonstrated by the 4-year-old underscores the fact that the focus of Pilates training is to regain the health an individual had as a child. Pilates believed that our

spines should be the same as they were when we were babies.

"That is where some Pilates training today takes into account curvatures that occur as we age," Miller said. "The aim is to restore the spine so there is freedom of movement and articulation."

Between 50 and 60 percent of Miller's clients are 50 or older, and she has had clients in their 80s.

It was Joseph Pilates' belief that mental and physical health were related. In Miller's experience, some of the elements apply. One client, a woman in her 60s, said that working with Miller had made her more aware of how her body functions and moves outside of class. She said the way she now stands can be attributed to improved balance from Pilates exercises.

Miller said the comment she hears most is "Wow, I really have to concentrate." That is because of muscle specification, she said.

"Part of the reason Pilates is so great for seniors is that we can do an entire workout, if needed, lying down and still work all the muscles in the body."

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Miller attended the University of Utah on a full ballet scholarship and joined the renowned ballet company Ballet West. After performing as a soloist for several other regional ballet companies, she branched out into choreography.

Miller was introduced to Pilates at the Center for Dance Medicine in San Francisco as a way to rehabilitate from injuries incurred as a soloist with the San Francisco Ballet.

Astonished at how much Pilates had helped her recover, she chose to make this her post-dance career. She became a Stott Pilates full-equipment instructor in 2003.

Having experienced the benefits of Pilates firsthand, that same year Miller she decided to open her own studio Pilates on Hudson.

She is currently writing a book about the anatomy of Pilates as expressed in layman's terms and also working on a radio show for a local station. So far, she has four shows in the can.

"I am overwhelmed with how many things one can do to get into shape in this area, ranging from wonderful trails to hike on, kayaking on the Sound or on the Hudson, to ice skating all year long in the Westchester Ice Skating Academy and skiing or playing softball on the local adult softball leagues. And that's just the tip of the iceberg."

Pilates is a part of that all, she added.

"People do Pilates so they can still do all this other stuff."

To learn more about Marilyn Miller and Pilates On Hudson, call (914) 739-1178 or visit pilatesonhudson.com.