

Healthy Byte

Wishing You the Best.

Pilates Exercise for Strength, Tone & Flexibility

You can sculpt your body with low impact exercise. An apparent "newcomer" to the fitness scene, Pilates exercise has actually been around for some time. It was developed in the early 1900's by German-born athlete and physical therapy pioneer, Joseph Pilates, to help rehabilitate war veterans.

Pilates exercise focuses on firming and strengthening your "core" muscles - the abdominals, glutes, and lower-back - so that the rest of your body learns to move with more ease. A properly developed core can also mean less fatigue and lowered incidence of back pain and injury.

Regular practice of Pilates exercise increases strength, flexibility and endurance and improves posture, alignment, coordination and balance--all without building bulky muscles. It slims the muscles and makes them more compact, in effect 'sculpting' your body.

Pilates emphasizes correct form--movement is not forced or repetitive. The strengthening and stretching movements are non-impact and stress-free, which is great for those with joint or back problems. When will you see benefits?

1. A sense of control and balance of the body is felt almost right away.
2. In a few short weeks, body alignment and tone appear.
3. Strength, flexibility and body shaping will all be apparent with regular practice.

One downside of Pilates is that it really does not provide an effective cardio workout. If Pilates is part of your fitness routine, be sure to supplement it with walking, cycling or other aerobic exercise.

It does take some time and instruction to master the different Pilates exercise movements and breathing. Pilates classes are now available at many venues, but can be expensive. If taking a class is out of your budget, there are many excellent videos available for use at home.

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Tips for Safe Winter Walking

The same snow and ice that creates a winter wonderland can turn familiar territory into a hazardous landscape for pedestrians and motorists. Before you take a step onto that slippery sidewalk, consider these safety tips.

- If the sidewalks and walkways are impassable and you have to walk in the street, walk against traffic and as close to the curb as you can.
- Proper gear is a must, but wearing dark "winter" colors can make it difficult for motorists to see you. Wear a brightly-colored scarf or hat or reflective gear, especially if you have to walk in the street. Don't forget gloves and footwear with non-slip soles.
- Snow that has accumulated into drifts can muffle the sounds of approaching motor vehicles. Hats and scarves that cover your ears can muffle or even block these sounds. Keep warm, but dress so that you can hear what's going on around you.
- If you can, shop before the storm hits. If you must shop, don't buy more than you can easily carry. Remember - the sidewalks and streets are slippery and carrying heavy packages can impair your balance.
- If you have to push a stroller or walk in the street, the child should be in front of you and as close to the curb as possible.
- Snow and ice may keep motorists from stopping at traffic signals or slowing down for pedestrians. Before stepping off the curb into the street, make sure that any approaching vehicles have completely stopped.

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Small Changes Can Cut Heart Risks

Moderate exercise and taking common dietary supplements can reduce heart disease risks significantly. Researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, said these actions can affect the risk of atherosclerosis because, combined, they boost the body's production of nitric oxide, which protects against a variety of cardio-vascular disorders.



They found moderate exercise reduced the development of hardening of the arteries in mice that are genetically prone to heart disease, because exercise alone has been shown to increase nitric oxide in the body. Adding the amino acid L-arginine and the anti-oxidants Vitamins C and E to the mix, however, significantly magnified the effect, researchers said. The studies, conducted with mice, showed taking all three dietary supplements resulted in lost weight and lower cholesterol when combined with exercise.

University of California
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Exercise Makes Kids Smarter

University of Illinois researchers say there's a correlation between physical fitness in children and classroom performance.

"We have found a strong relationship between academic achievement and fitness scores," said Darla Castelli, a professor of kinesiology. "Those who scored well in academics also did well in physical fitness. We're not suggesting that if we run more laps it will make us smarter, but there does appear to be a correlation."

Castelli, fellow professor Charles Hillman and graduate student Sarah Buck conducted a series of tests on 500 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders in Champaign, Ill., to measure aerobic capacity, flexibility and muscle fitness, and also analyzed their standardized test scores.

"We found that fit children allocated more resources towards identifying stimuli, and also processed stimuli faster," Hillman said.

"Behaviorally, these effects showed up in that these fit children made fewer errors than sedentary ones," Hillman said. In terms of response speed, the fit children were still slower than fit and sedentary adults, but were faster than sedentary children, he said.

Safe Home Tips

When it comes to home safety, there are dangers in every room in the house and in the yard. If you have children, safety becomes an even bigger issue. The tips below will help you ensure your home is safe.

Bathroom Safety:

- Keep medicines and cleaning products in containers with safety caps.
- Flush all old medications down the toilet.
- Store medicines in original containers with original labels.
- Keep first aid supplies well stocked and easily available.
- Unplug and store electrical appliances when not in use.
- Place non-skid mats or decals in the tub/shower.
- Use safety latches for drawers and cabinets.
- Never leave a child alone in the bathtub or near any water.
- Keep water temperature at or below 120 degrees.

Kitchen Safety

- Keep pot handles turned to the back of the stove and use the back burners.
- Keep flammable items away from the stove.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen.
- Store harmful products (such as cleaning supplies) in their original containers and make sure all harmful products have safety packaging.
- Store household cleaning products, knives, matches, and plastic bags away from children.
- Install safety latches for drawers and cabinets.
- Use child resistant trash cans or store trash can in a cabinet with a safety latch.
- Do not leave child unattended when using a highchair.

Living Area Safety

- Install smoke detectors on each floor and change batteries each year.
- Make sure electrical cords are not beneath furniture, rugs, or carpeting.
- Use safety plugs to cover electrical outlets.
- Keep furniture children can climb away from glass doors and windows.

Backyard Safety

- Secure loose railings on porches and decks.
- Install child-proof locks on the pool fence.
- Anchor home playground equipment firmly in the ground.
- Check neighborhood for water hazards

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Ideas for Family Night

Family nights are a growing trend among busy families. In an effort to stay connected to each other, many busy families have instituted regularly occurring family nights. Below are some ideas to help you get your own family night started.



The first step is to figure out when family night will work best for everyone. When are all your family members home? After you have determined what night works best, block it off and set it in stone! No canceling, no rescheduling, just a standing family night to occur at the same time at regular intervals. Family night may be weekly for families with small children, family night may even be quarterly if your children are in college.

Next, you need to decide what you will do during family night. One of the easiest ways to do this is to have everyone write down their chosen family night activity on a piece of paper. Fold these up, drop them in a hat and draw one. Next family night, take out that selection and repeat the process. Always be sure to rotate the activities of family night so everyone gets to do the activity they want.

Of course, any family night centered on food is a good one. Maybe you can plan a menu for family night, or make that the night you order pizza. No matter whether your family night is big or small, includes neighbors or just your own family, there is no set rule, just make it your own and repeat it regularly!

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Exercise Builds Kids' Bones

Research at the University School of Medicine in Indianapolis indicates exercise not only builds muscle, it builds bones.

Charles Turner, professor of orthopedic surgery, said running or jumping, as opposed to swimming or biking, are especially good at building bones in children. What he called "serious weight-lifting," however, is not recommended, because, he said, it can overload joints and stunt longitudinal bone growth.

Turner reported his findings at American Physiological Society's 2004 Intersociety Meeting in Austin, Texas.

University School of Medicine
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Heat Good for Muscle Treatment

A recent study suggests that continuous low-level heat wrap therapy may be effective for treatment and prevention of exercise-induced muscle soreness. The results of the study were presented at the 17th World Conference of Family Doctors by researchers from U.S. Spine & Sport Foundation in Orlando, Fla.

Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness is muscle soreness occurring within 24-48 hours after unusual exertion during physical activity. The muscle soreness is often caused by microscopic tearing of muscle fibers.

Study participants treated with low-level heat prior to exercising reported less pain and disability after 24 hours than those who only performed stretches. Continuous low level heat was also found better than ice for treating muscle pain in the lower back.

"This is the first time we have found a therapy to reduce, prevent, and treat DOMS of the low back muscles induced by vigorous exercise on specialized equipment," said John Mayer, Director of Research at U.S. Spine & Sport Foundation. "Simply wearing a portable heat wrap immediately prior to exercise cut pain and disability almost in half."

U.S. Spine & Sport Foundation
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Home Blood Pressure Readings May Be Off

More people are taking their blood pressure by home monitoring, but a new study suggests they may be making some common errors

While up to one-third of people diagnosed with hypertension in Canada's urban areas have a blood pressure monitor at home, the measurements may be inaccurate. "The monitors are generally quite accurate, the people who use them generally are not," said Dr. Thomas Wilson, a professor of medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. The results were presented Sunday at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress in Calgary.

In a study of 80 patients who bought digital blood pressure monitors, Wilson and his colleagues found 90 percent of them didn't know they should rest for at least two minutes before taking a reading. Half knew to place the cuff just above the elbow, and 70 percent didn't know that how they sit could alter the reading. Wilson said a patient's back should be supported with legs uncrossed and the arm resting at heart level.

Otherwise the readings may be too high or too low, and the

patient may be given an incorrect dose of medicine or none at all.

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Child Safety Seat Use Increases

A study at a Philadelphia hospital finds that parents are more likely now to use child safety restraints. But the survey conducted by Partners for Child Passenger Safety found that 62 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 8 are still restrained in adult seat belts. The research partnership of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm Insurance reported its findings in a recent issue of *Pediatrics*. Investigators examined 10,000 children younger than 9 who were in crashes reported to State Farm between 1999 and 2002.



The use of child restraints increased for every age each year, a sign that public education campaigns and state laws are working, said Dr. Flora Winston, a researcher at Children's Hospital. The group recommends child safety seats for very young children, followed by adult seat belts used with booster seats as children get larger. Children under the age of 13 should sit in the rear seats of passenger cars.

Partners for Child Passenger Safety
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Make Popcorn Healthy

Popcorn -- high in fiber and low in calories -- can be good for your health if you keep it free of oil, butter and cheese, nutritionists say. Noting the average American eats some 59 quarts of popcorn each year, the Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource offers some kernels of wisdom on keeping popcorn a healthy snack.

These include: Consider air-popped popcorn, the healthiest kind, with 93 calories and no fat in a 3-cup serving; when preparing popcorn, use a monounsaturated fat, such as canola oil or olive oil or safflower, corn or sunflower oils; check labels carefully for fat, calorie and sodium, which vary considerably for microwave or pre-popped popcorn; look for the light varieties with no more than 2 grams of total fat, 1 gram of saturated fat and 200 milligrams of salt in a 3-cup serving; be careful around movie theater popcorn, which tends to be high in saturated fats and calories; and, avoid super-sized portions.

Mayo Clinic Women's Health Source

Seniors Need to Continue to Socialize

U.S. researchers have found that seniors need to continue to socialize, no matter their age.

Researchers at the University of Michigan said senior citizens, even when living alone and independently in apartments, should interact often with others -- both friends and family members -- if they want to maintain their ability to communicate. A lifestyle with organized activities seems to provide the best social opportunities for the elderly, they said.

The researchers examined the relationships among social engagement, cognition and communication skills. They reviewed notebooks kept by the study's participants, who tracked the frequency, purpose and quality of their interactions. They tested the participants on their ability to name objects in pictures, a common measure of language skill ability.

Individuals who experienced less cognitive decline were involved in a wider range of relationships, each of which challenged those individuals to speak and listen to others on a range of topics. When the elderly limited their contact solely to family members, however, they did not fare as well.

University of Michigan
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Knowing When to Stop the Exercise

There are times after an injury to stop exercising, but all pain does not necessarily mean you have to kick back, experts say. If you rest too long, you may even feel more discomfort.

Regular exercise provides benefits, including helping to minimize pain. For example, strength training builds up muscles around your joints, providing structural support and protection. Exercise causes your body to release chemicals called endorphins, which block pain signals from reaching your brain. They also help relieve anxiety and depression, both of which can make pain worse. The Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource says you can keep going if: your muscles are sore and aching or your doctor gives the go-ahead.

You should stop if: you have swelling around a joint, especially if it's red and warm; your joint pain worsens with exercise; you have a fever without an illness; you have pain when you bear weight; or if the joint feels unstable.

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