Spring Into Pilates

This popular fitness system can improve your core strength and flexibility—quick!

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Nature renews itself each spring—and so can you. Rejuvenate your tired workout routine with Pilates. A series of movements usually done on a mat or a machine, Pilates (developed in the 1920s by gymnast Joseph Pilates) tones the body while constantly engaging the abdominal (core) muscles. But those aren't the only benefits of this exercise method favored by dancers across the globe.

"[Pilates improves] your body's alignment and mobility," says licensed acupuncturist Jordanna Dworkin of InTouch, a New York City healing sanctuary. "[You also achieve] stronger, leaner and meaner muscles."

Beginners are advised to start with at least five one-on-one sessions with an instructor. The goal is to become more aware of the body's alignment and movements while learning the sequences. For maximum benefits, take Pilates mat and Pilates reformer (a resistance machine) classes at least three times a week.

Dworkin says everybody can do Pilates, even people with injuries. But she stresses they should first get their doctor's OK before starting their first class. She also says it helps to be supervised by a licensed Pilates practitioner.

Never Done Pilates?
This basic mat routine is super easy—even for beginners.

The Hundred
Lie on your back with legs in the air and arms straight at your sides. Bend knees at a 90- degree angle. While inhaling, reach arms up and hold briefly. Bring arms back down to the floor and exhale while lifting head and rolling up slightly. Hold position and inhale while slightly pulsing the arms up and down for five beats. Exhale while repeating the same arm movement for five beats. Hold the position and repeat for 10 more beats.

Roll Up
Lie flat on your back with legs straight and feet pointed. Put your arms above you at a 90-degree angle with your shoulders flat on the ground. Pull bellybutton toward your spine. Slowly lift the

arms higher while rolling your body up and lifting your head. Let your abs control the movement. Reach for your toes, but do not touch them. Pull lower abs in and slowly roll back down.

Leg Circles
Lie on your back, arms at sides, knees bent and feet flat on floor. Raise one leg straight up to the ceiling. Move the raised leg in circles. Use the abs to stabilize your torso and hips. Circle five times to the right, then five times to the left. Repeat with opposite leg.

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