

BOSU® Balance Trainer Rounds Out Pilates

The BOSU ball offers a fresh approach to many Pilates exercises.

The BOSU Balance Trainer is the perfect accessory to complement a wide range of authentic Pilates exercises. In this article, you'll learn to incorporate the BOSU ball into traditional mat and equipment exercises. Regardless of how experienced your clients are, this workout will give you dynamic and fresh content to use with them, both in one-on-one training and in group settings.

Adding a BOSU ball to many of the Pilates exercises helps “dimensionalize” and change the repertoire. In some instances, it can serve as a wonderful assist for a client, making certain exercises easier and more manageable. For example, during spine stretch sitting, the BOSU ball helps keep the hamstrings and hip flexors from overfiring, which allows for better functional elongation of the spine. Conversely, this equipment can “up the ante” when balance, proprioception and overall difficulty need to be addressed. For instance, flipping the BOSU ball on its dome and placing the feet on the platform while performing the pelvic curl dramatically changes how the brain organizes the articulation of the movement, while also providing a much more challenging exercise pattern for the hamstrings and gluteals.

Before introducing the BOSU ball into a client's Pilates sessions, be sure to assess the client's goals, limitations and contraindications and be prepared to modify exercises as needed.

The Workout

Feel free to teach this workout in its entirety or to use one or two segments at a time, as part of an equipment-based Pilates session.



STOTT PILATES photography © Merrithew Corporation

Execute 5–10 repetitions of each exercise (throughout).

Key: I = Inhale, E = Exhale.

Warm-Up

Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
roll-up	Sit on BOSU ball with gluteals just above base, arms outstretched in front of you at shoulder width, parallel to floor. Extend legs with adductors “glued” together.	I: Prepare. E: Tip pubic bone toward face, roll back and take arms overhead. I: Pause. E: Roll up to starting position.	Make sure not to “pop out” rib cage when rolling back. Maintain long line from tips of fingers to tips of toes. When seated, try staying in “C” curve position to maintain slight contraction through abdomen.
overhead reach	Sit on BOSU ball with gluteals just above base, arms outstretched in front of you at shoulder width, parallel to floor. Have knees bent, feet hip width apart and parallel.	I: Reach arms overhead and begin to extend spine and abdomen over BOSU ball. E: Sweep arms wide and curl up from sternum, bringing arms back to starting position. Repeat, circling arms in reverse direction.	Roll back only to where rib cage does not pop out. Treat air as something very thick, as if you were reaching back through marshmallow creme.

Gluteals Prone Series



Gluteals Prone Series: frog.

Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
frog	For all three exercises: Lie prone, pelvis on apex of BOSU, forehead on backs of hands down on floor. Begin with legs in frog position.	I: Lower legs toward floor. E: Lift legs by squeezing gluteals and tightening hamstrings.	Don't let go of the quarter between your gluteals.
extended frog		I: Extend legs out into V position. E: Draw legs together, squeeze inner thighs and keep quadriceps lifted. Reverse direction after 8–10 reps.	Treat air as something very thick, to promote active movement around hip.
opening		I: Open legs into V position. E: Draw legs together, squeeze inner thighs and keep quadriceps lifted.	

Elongation Series



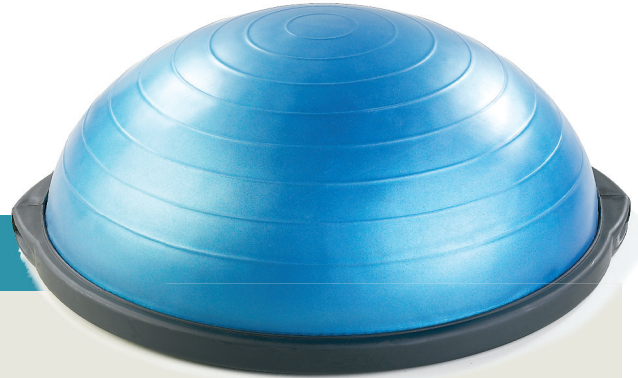
Elongation Series: spine twist sitting.

Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
spine stretch sitting	For all three exercises: Sit on apex of BOSU ball, spine extended toward ceiling, knees straight, feet shoulder width apart (dorsiflexed), arms out in front of you with palms facing each other.	I: Prepare. E: Drop chin to chest and begin to roll down and reach over toes. I: Extend through spine and arms, and find diagonal. E: Dive back over toes, and roll; articulate back up and restack spine to starting position.	Focus on rolling down from crown of head as if you were a snake, then reaching over toes. Look for long diagonal line of spine when going into extension.
spine twist sitting		I: Prepare. E: Twist around spine in two-pump percussive breath. I: Return to center. E: Rotate to other side.	Keep hips square as you spiral around your mid-back. Think of spinal column as corkscrew and your waist as having a tight belt around it. Each time you twist, your belt gets tighter.
saw		I: Twist around spine into rotation. E: Reach on diagonal over toes with elongated spine. I: Lift back up on that rotational axis. E: Twist back to center.	Combine spine stretch and spine twist, keeping spine extended. >>

PHOTOGRAPHY: PRISCILLA CHRISTIAN; MODEL: ERIKA QUEST

5 Benefits of Using a BOSU Ball

1. adds a balance challenge
2. makes some “easier” Pilates exercises more challenging
3. provides an assist when certain muscles need to be taken out of the equation
4. confuses the neurotransmitters and testing proprioceptors
5. “dimensionalizes” the workout and adds a bit of fun!



Core Series



Core Series: single leg stretch.

Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
double leg stretch	Lie supine, with lower back on apex of BOSU ball, in your sweet spot. Have knees in tabletop position, palms of hands pressing on tops of knees.	I: Reach arms out behind and legs out in front. E: Pull arms and legs back to starting position.	Reach and extend in both directions as if someone were stretching you out like salt-water taffy.
single leg stretch	Same as for double leg stretch.	I: Prepare. E: Extend one leg out, transferring palm of hand to bent knee. I: Pause. E: Switch legs.	Keep eyes gazing at tops of knees and glide each heel in same plane, as if you were lying on floor and dusting your coffee table with your heels.
crisscross	Lie supine, with lower back on apex of BOSU ball, in your sweet spot. Have knees in tabletop position, fingers interlaced behind head.	Same as for single leg stretch, but add rotation toward bent knee.	Keep opposite hip reaching down into BOSU ball as you arc up and over toward other side.


Arms Supine Series




Arms Supine Series: setup position for entire series.

Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
hug a tree	For all three exercises: Lie supine, with shoulder girdle and cervical spine on BOSU ball. Place feet hip width apart on floor, in plank position. Extend arms toward ceiling with soft bend in elbows. Hold 1- to 5-pound weight in each hand. Sand weights are preferable.	I: Open arms. E: Close arms.	Think of each exercise as part of supine series on reformer with progressive spring tension. Imagine air is extremely thick, like quicksand. Use sand weights, and apply active breathing pattern to initiate each open-chain movement.
changes		I: Reach one arm back and one arm forward. E: Return to 12 o'clock starting position.	
helicopter		I: Reach one arm back and one arm forward. E: Sweep arms wide and around and return to 12 o'clock starting position. Reverse directions each time, to challenge proprioception.	


Full-Body Integration Series

	Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
	front support	Begin in plank position, hands shoulder width apart on BOSU ball, feet hip width apart behind it.	I: Pull one leg forward and tap front of BOSU ball. E: Send leg back to plank position. Alternate legs.	Keep body stable in perfect plank. It is okay to tuck pelvis slightly. Hold oranges (without squeezing) under arm pits. [To cue "lats down."]
Full-Body Integration Series: leg pull.	leg pull front	Same as for front support.	I: Transfer weight to one foot. E: Pulse free leg to ceiling. Alternate legs.	Point toe and press one leg to ceiling in arabesque position.
	Pilates push-up	Begin in plank or kneeling plank position, hands on outside of BOSU ball and feet hip width apart behind it.	I: Pull elbows directly back to rib cage. E: Press back up to starting position.	Maintain stable scapulae and hinge backward from elbows.

Lateral Flexion

	Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
Lateral Flexion Series: lower-torso side lift.	lower-torso side lift	Lie on one side, bottom hip near apex of BOSU ball and stacked underneath top hip, legs extended straight out parallel to floor, inner thighs glued together. Place bottom elbow or forearm on floor, top-arm fingers either behind head or on BOSU dome for more sup-	I: Prepare. E: Lift both legs toward ceiling. I: Lower legs.	Reach out long through toes first and then slightly lift up toward ceiling.

Back Extension Series

	Exercise	Description / Setup	Breath / Movement Pattern	Cues
Back Extension Series: swimming.	basic back	Lie prone, pelvis on apex of BOSU ball, arms glued to thighs, legs extended behind. Balance on dome.	I: Reach out and up through crown of head, and lift upper body. E: Lower to start. <small>Note: Cue breath in reverse if it helps keep abdominals drawn into spine on exhalation.</small>	Reach out long through crown of head as you slide fingers back toward feet.
	swimming	Lie prone, pelvis slightly below apex of BOSU ball, legs extended wide, hips externally rotated, upper body lifted and arms out in front, shoulder width apart.	I: Lift one arm and opposite leg. E: Switch.	Imagine intercostal muscles as sponges filled with water: while you're swimming, you're squeezing and wringing out all that water between individual ribs. ■

Erika Quest is the owner of Studio Q Pilates Conditioning in Laguna Beach, California, and a Body Arts & Science graduate. An IDEA World Fitness Convention™ presenter in 2009 and 2010, she is a content developer and star of the BOSU® Studio Pilates DVD and the new "2011 BOSU® Pilates 3D" workshop.