Central Moves

Use Pilates exercises to teach participants about stabilization, balance and core strength.

The core holds the body in alignment and allows the extremities to move in a more efficient and effective manner. Pilates helps increase core strength and stabilization by creating simultaneous demands for strength and flexibility. The result: enhanced movement quality. The body moves the way it was designed to move. The following exercises move progressively from one movement pattern to the next—from a stable seated posture, rolling down to a fully supported posture, then transitioning to a position that challenges stability, balance and overall core strength.

Half Roll-Downs

Begin seated on mat with bent knees, hands around outside of knees. Inhale, and on exhalation, roll halfway down till low back comes in contact with floor; arms are now fully extended. Pause in this position, inhale, and then exhale as you roll up to start position. Maintain a consistent "C" curve throughout by drawing abdominal muscles in toward spine. Engage pelvic-floor muscles, feeling a lifting sensation—as if you were zipping up a tight pair of pants—as you contract abdominals. Do 3 repetitions, and end lying supine (face up) on mat.

Modification: Use your arms to assist you if you have difficulty rolling up.

Progressive Hundred

Begin supine with knees in tabletop position over hips, shins parallel to ceiling, arms at sides. Inhale, and on exhalation, lift head and shoulders, allowing arms to hover about a quarter inch off floor. Maintain consistent contraction in abdominals and pelvic-floor muscles, and vigorously pump arms at sides, keeping arms straight and rigid. Reach them long as you inhale for 5 counts and then exhale for 5 counts. After 3 repetitions, extend legs to 90-degree angle and continue for 3–7 repetitions.

Modification: Keep legs bent throughout and/or leave head and shoulders down.

One-Legged Bridge

Begin lying supine, knees bent, feet and legs hip width apart, arms at sides. Raise one leg so that knee is at 90-degree angle to hip and calf is parallel to floor. Inhale, and on exhalation, raise pelvis off floor until you are resting on shoulders in ramplike position. As you lift, keep trunk rigid and reach fingers toward feet to keep upper body stable and maintain core stability. Hold this position, and on inhalation, straighten raised leg. Exhaling, return leg to bent position; inhaling, lower torso to start. Do 4–6 repetitions.

Modification: Keep leg bent throughout exercise. Avoid this exercise if neck problems exist, or limit the movement to pelvic tilts.

Elbow Plank With Rotation

Begin in prone position (face down), elbows bent and close to waist, hands beneath shoulders. On inhalation, curl toes under; on exhalation, raise torso to elbow plank position. Push through heels to evenly distribute body weight. While maintaining elbow plank, inhale and lower right hip bone by rotating torso down toward floor. Exhale and return to center. Repeat on opposite side, maintaining strong upper-body stabilization throughout. Work up to 3 repetitions on each side.

Modification: Lower torso to floor between repetitions.

Thigh Stretch With a Twist

Transition from elbow plank to all-fours position, then to upright kneeling position, knees together. Extend arms in front of chest. On inhalation, lean back, rotating right. Bring right arm down toward ankle behind you. Maintaining neutral spine, continue to lean and rotate back until you feel stretch in quadriceps.

Briefly hold this position, and on exhalation, return to start, pressing shins into floor to avoid overextending spine. Repeat on opposite side, and work up to 3–4 repetitions on each side.

Modification: Decrease range of motion going back. Add small, soft ball or towel between legs to increase and maintain inner-thigh connection and enhance pelvic-floor engagement.

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