

Pilates Myths and Facts

Our society has become inundated with fitness fads, programs and equipment options, each heralding the promise to help you build a better body. Sifting through the facts to choose the best regime can be overwhelming.

The Pilates Method is one of the better-known exercise programs designed to stretch, strengthen and condition the core postural muscles, and keep the body balanced. Originally designed during World War I, this program has enjoyed resurgence in mainstream popularity across North America and around the world. The Pilates Method enjoys a cult-like status, with modern practitioners reviving many of the original strength training exercises.

Like all exercise programs, the Pilates Method carries both myths and facts. According to a recent advertisement for the Pilates Method, here are some of those questions and answers.

Myth #1: Exercising with traditional weights can cause imbalance and overstress the back. The Pilates Method corrects muscle imbalance, realigns the body and helps to heal injured backs.

Fact: It is possible to correct imbalances and enhance postural alignment with suitably individualized Pilates and progressive weight training programs. However, both Pilates and weight training programs can be injurious if poorly taught. The bottom line is that there is no scientific or clinical evidence proving that the Pilates Method is any better or worse than any other form of training.

Myth #2: While weight training tends to shorten the muscles, the Pilates Method actually lengthens them. Weight lifting will bunch up the muscles, leaving the body feeling tight and stiff.

Fact: Muscles shorten and contract when they are activated, and they lengthen when relaxed. When your muscles appear to lengthen and flatten with training, it means that you are actually losing muscle bulk. This is not a highly desirable state for anyone. In light of this fact, there is no truth to the myth that the Pilates Method lengthens the muscles. This belief betrays the very basic understanding of muscle physiology. This suggests that the more Pilates Method exercises you perform, the longer your muscles become. If this were true, your muscles would develop slack over time, and you would eventually lose the ability to move your joints.

Myth #3: Those offering training in the Pilates Method say that there are more than 2000 exercises, and the program offers much more variety than simple weight training.

Fact: In reality, the Pilates Method doesn't even come close to the number of exercises available through the various weight-training methods. Experts in the field of weight training note that there are at least ten times as many exercises and exercise variations, including those using weight machines and free barbell and dumbbell weights.

Those who practice the Pilates Method know that in addition to the many exercises involved in the program, there are also a number of well-known machines. The Reformer, Cadillac and Spine Collector are just a few of the machines created by Joseph Pilates. These machines were developed from a variety of weird and wonderful exercise contraptions that were sold in the fitness market of Europe and Russia during the 19th and early 20th century. Many men and women who believe that they are practicing very unique exercises under the Pilates Method are simply doing other types of strength training programs. Pilates practitioners who believe that Joseph Pilates had a totally unique approach or philosophy may be surprised to learn there were a number of the strengthening trends setters of the past who held philosophies that were not dramatically different from those of Pilates. Experts suggest that anyone interested in learning more about this area should read Webster's "The Iron Game."

Whether you are interested in working out to lose weight or to stay fit, there are many options available to you. Learn to separate the myths from the facts in order to find the best fitness program to meet your personal needs.