

Pilates and the 5 Key Elements - Author- Charlotte Roberts

Set yourself up with these 5 key elements before each exercise and practice raising your perception of posture daily using these techniques.

The 5 Key Elements

1. Lateral breathing
2. Centering
3. Ribcage placement
4. Shoulder blade placement
5. Head and neck placement

1. Lateral Breathing

Though Pilates you will learn the correct and natural way to breathe which will improve your breath pattern and depth. This is vital in order to get sufficient oxygen to working muscles to rid the body of waste products and delay the onset of fatigue. Many people only use a fraction of their lung volume and deny themselves the benefits of correct and efficient breathing.

Homework

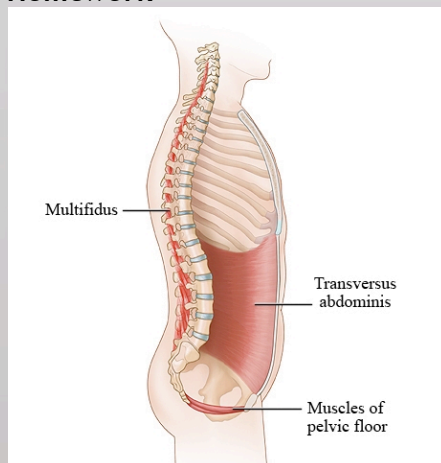
Lay on your back with your hips and knees bent up (rest position), you can place your head on a pillow if more comfortable. Place your hands across the lower half of your ribcage with the tips of your fingers slightly interlaced, relax your shoulders. Breathe in and allow your ribs to expand width ways (let your fingertips draw apart). Breathe out and allow your ribcage to sink inwards and downwards (your fingertips may interlace slightly as you empty your lungs).

Imagine: - the back of your ribcage spreading wide and relaxing on the mat beneath you.

2. Centering

Pilates aims to develop a strong central core of abdominal, lower back and pelvic floor muscles. These postural muscles support the spine, pelvis and abdomino-pelvic organs all day long.

Homework





Finding your neutral spine position

Lie in the rest position. Place your thumbs on your belly button and your fingertips on the pubic bone to make the shape of a 'pelvic diamond'. Now imagine you have placed a marble in this diamond. Tilt your pelvic diamond away from you to exaggerate the curve in your lower back, the marble will drop to the fingers (base of the diamond), then tilt the pelvic diamond towards you to flatten your back (the marble will move to your thumbs). Continue to repeat these gentle tilting movements and settle your position of the pelvic diamond in the middle of these two positions, so the marble rests in the middle of the diamond. This will be your 'neutral spine' position. The point you will begin each exercise from.

Setting your abdominal muscles

Remain in your neutral spine position. Place your fingers on your pelvic bones and now slide your fingers in and downwards ~4cm. Imagine your deep abdominal muscles forming a natural corset. Breathe in to prepare now as you breathe out slowly and gently draw in the muscular corset below your belly button (you should feel the muscles under your fingertips subtly draw away). Hold your centre and keep breathing normally.

3. Ribcage placement

Ideally your ribcage should be aligned directly above your pelvis however many people tend to flare their ribcage forwards which can lead to poor posture, stiffness, muscle tightness and pain.

Homework

Lie in the rest position, find your neutral spine and set your centre. Breathe in to prepare and then breathe out and lift your arms slowly overhead as far as you can while keeping the back of your ribcage on the mat. Do NOT allow your ribcage to flare and think about softening your breastbone.

Imagine: - A set of springs from your ribcage to your pelvic bones, the tension in these springs should remain constant as you raise and lower your arms.

4. Shoulder blade placement

We need excellent stability around our shoulder blades for movement of our arms and neck.

Homework

Lie in the rest position, find your neutral spine position and set your centre. Float your arms upwards towards the ceiling (imagine you holding a helium balloon between your fingertips) allow your arms to lift further upwards and glide your shoulder blades gently apart. Breathe out and gently draw your shoulder blades back together without pinching them together.

Imagine: your collarbones are opening wide and your shoulder blades are wide and relaxed on the mat.



5. Head and neck placement

Our head and neck experience a lot of strain due to poor posture and placement. We need to be able to relax our deep neck flexors and work on lengthening the muscles at the back of the neck.

Homework

Lie in the rest position and slightly tuck your chin towards your chest to lengthen the back of the neck. In sitting position try for a few moments retracting your chin to make a double chin posture to stretch the muscles at the back of the neck.

“In 10 sessions, you will feel the difference. In 20, you will see the difference. And in 30, you’ll be on your way to having a whole new body.” - Joseph Pilates

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