



Pilates in the Rehab Environment

Today most people have heard of Pilates, and it continues to be one of the fastest growing exercise programs in the world. Far from being a recent fitness phenomenon, Pilates was actually created in the early 20th century by Joseph Hubertus Pilates.

Born in 1883, Joseph Pilates suffered from ill health as a child and in his search for a healthier life through athletics and exercise he became an avid boxer and gymnast. Living in England at the start of WW I, Pilates was interned in a hospital along with other German nationals. It was in this setting and through this internship that he began to formulate his own exercise system designed to balance the mind, body and spirit which he used to rehabilitate patients. In 1926, along with his wife, he brought his system of exercise to New York City and opened his first studio. There he began rehabilitating injured dancers and created the equipment designed to address his client's rehab needs.



Joseph Pilates

In light of this, it's no surprise that more recently physical therapists and their clients have discovered that Pilates is effective for rehabilitating injuries and chronic illness. Supported by research, Pilates has been shown to be effective for a range of movement problems including:

Orthopedic injury or surgery, Back pain, Stroke, Parkinson's, MS, Spinal Cord injuries, Traumatic Brain Injury, Cancer, Fibromyalgia, Balance disorders

The goal of the physical therapist utilizing Pilates is to go beyond just rehabilitating an injured or dysfunctional body part, to creating a pain free movement experience for clients, restoring them to full function at work and home. The Pilates principles of breathing, strength, coordination, balance, motor control, flexibility and function are used in rehab settings to create a positive movement experience for each client. In most cases the classic Pilates exercises are modified to fit the rehab goals and physical needs of each individual client.

Pilates and physical therapy can be seen in terms of a *strategy of healing* that progresses from assessment to function. In combination, they provide a continuum of care that starts with addressing structural limitations and restrictions in the body and progresses to movement re-education to correct faulty movement patterns and ensure continued pain free function.

Within the rehabilitation setting, most Pilates exercises are performed on several types of equipment, the most common being the Reformer. On the Reformer, springs and gravity are used to assist a client to perform movements successfully. Ultimately, by altering the spring tension or increasing the challenge of gravity, an individual may be progressed toward achieving full functional movement.



Pilates training for physical therapists requires an in depth knowledge of the Pilates repertoire, critical reasoning to identify objectives, and the ability to match clients goals, design a plan of care, create modifications, and adjust the program to progress the client towards function.

At BE Fit's UVAC location, Betsy Ogden, PT is a Pilates Rehab Specialist through Polestar Pilates. If you're interested in finding out more about this approach and how you might benefit, feel free to email her at Betsy@befit-pt.com.

Anderson, B.D. and Spector, A. (2000, September). [Introduction to pilates-based rehabilitation](#). Orthopaedic Physical Therapy Clinics of North America, 9 (3), 395-410.
<http://www.goodshepherdrehab.org/pilates>

<http://www.pilatesfoundation.com/pilates/the-history-of-pilates/>

