

# Can You Reach Your Fitness Goals with Pilates?

Pilates is a popular low-impact fitness program that can be practiced on a floor mat or an exercise machine called a Pilates Reformer.

Without the need for free weights, a weight bench, and explosive movements, Pilates can help you stretch and tone your muscles using your body weight and adjustable bands, rings, and coils to increase resistance.

If you've tried yoga or barre exercise programs, you know how small, intentional movements can make a big difference in how you look and feel. Pilates uses similar principles to engage and build large muscle groups, core muscles, and smaller supporting muscles you probably don't use in daily activities.



Because Pilates avoids jumping and lifting heavy weights, it may be a good option for people of all ages and fitness levels seeking a challenging and relatively safe exercise program.

## How safe is Pilates?

“All types of activity have a risk for injury if performed incorrectly,” says Carolyn Marie Kienstra, M.D., who practices orthopaedic sports medicine at the University of

Miami Sports Medicine Institute. “The important thing with beginning any new form of workout or advancing your skills is to take it slow and work with someone who can help you learn how to do things with correct form.”

Pilates can be practiced at home on a mat as you follow an instructional video. But, if you’re new to it, try group classes or one-on-one sessions at a local studio or gym. Certified Pilates instructors can provide feedback to correct your form to help you avoid injury or pushing yourself while encouraging you to reach your full athletic potential.

Pilates classes can also give you access to the Reformer machine.

At first glance, the Pilates Reformer may appear to be a torture device. But its innovative design allows users to smoothly flow from one position to another, typically while laying on your back or stomach. The pilates machine’s resistance tools provide options for making the routine more challenging as your skills and abilities improve.

“Both the mat and the Pilates Reformer engage similar muscles,” Dr. Kienstra says. “But, they use different movements to target them based on the equipment available.”

## Is Pilates effective?

Even if you exercise regularly, “challenging your body in a new way is always good,” Dr. Kienstra says. “Our bodies adapt to our normal exercise routine, so mixing things up helps us develop new skills and strengthen different muscle groups.

Building the strength of your core muscles, for example, helps prevent and recover from overuse injuries. There are many ways to strengthen those muscles, including

Pilates. It's a great choice if it's something you enjoy."

Many of us jumpstart a new exercise routine (especially at the start of a new year) with high hopes of reaching specific fitness goals. Pilates devotees often claim that this particular exercise program helps build long, lean muscles without bulking up.

But, the truth is, "everyone develops muscle differently," Dr. Kienstra says. "So, this may be the case for some people who practice Pilates, but not for others."

Regardless of your fitness and health goals this year, make cardio and strength-training exercises a regular part of your weekly routine. If you're considering giving Pilates a try, ask your physician if it's a good choice for you.

Take your time to practice proper form and technique to avoid injury and over-exhaustion. And stick with it for two to three months to see how your strength, endurance, and flexibility improve over time.

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