

## Reformer Pilates

Reformer Pilates is based on traditional Pilates, but has been modified to enhance posture, core stability, balance, control, strength and flexibility.

These five key elements will allow you to get the most out of each Pilates exercise:

### **What are the five key elements of Pilates, and why are they important?**

Clinical Pilates emphasises the importance of beginning each movement with a stable core, and adjusting the intensity of an exercise through various limb movement and equipment. Our aim is to correct biomechanical imbalances to ensure rehabilitation following an injury, and prevent recurrence.

- 1. Lateral Breathing:** Focusing on the breathing cycle allows efficient local muscle stability and optimal gas exchange. Research shows that activation of the deep abdominal muscle (transverse abdominis) is strongest when exhaling, therefore breathing out with difficult movements optimises your stability.  
To practice: lying on your back, knees bent and spine in a neutral position. Place your fingers together over your rib cage. Take a full deep breath in, filling the sides and back of your rib cage while keeping your shoulders relaxed. You may feel your fingers pull apart. Breathe out and repeat.
- 2. Centering:** Pilates is focussed around retraining and facilitating your “core stability” muscles; transverse abdominis, multifidus and pelvic floor. Centring prior to each exercise ensures you perform the exercise safely and effectively.  
To practice: lying on your back, knees bent and spine in a neutral position. Imagine a thick belt running around your lower tummy. Gently place your fingers on the inside of your hip bones to feel your tummy muscles. Slowly and gently pull your lower tummy muscles (transverse abdominis) inwards, away from the imaginary belt. If you feel a budge in the muscles, or your tummy is doming up then you are working too hard.
- 3. Ribcage placement:** The ribcage should be aligned above the pelvis and not allowed to “flare”. This helps to reduce stress on the muscles at the back of the ribcage which can cause tightness, stiffness and pain.  
To practice: lying on your back, knees bent and spine in a neutral position. Visualise the back of your ribcage relaxing wide underneath you, melting into the floor. Soften through the front of the ribcage. To challenge this position, raise your arms towards the ceiling, and while breathing out lower your arms back over your head while maintaining your soft rib position.
- 4. Shoulder blade placement:** Stability around the shoulder blade is essential for efficient movement of your arms and neck.  
To practice: in sitting, start by sliding your shoulder blades up and down your back, this will help you become aware of their movement and position. From here allow them to relax into their neutral position. Think about keeping your collarbone wide. Maintain the position of your shoulder blade and practice lifting your arm out in front of you over head, and then returning back to your side.
- 5. Head and neck placement:** Our modern way of life has bought about poor head and neck postures, which can lead to headaches, upper back stiffness and pain.  
To practice: in sitting, imagine a string attached to the top of your head, and allow it to lengthen your spine. Allow a gentle chin nod to lengthen through the back of the neck.