You’ve probably heard of Pilates (pronounced “peh-lah-tayz”) before. Maybe one of your friends swears by it, or you’ve seen classes at your local health club. This popular exercise system was developed about 90 years ago by Joseph Pilates, a German physical trainer. It includes exercises that are based around the body’s core, or “powerhouse,” and so targets your abdominal muscles in addition to the rest of your body. The exercises are done in a slow, controlled manner with a focus on form, precision and breath.

Doing Pilates can help you build overall strength, improve your flexibility and connect with your body. Its focus on strengthening your core also makes you more efficient in your movements and may reduce your risk of injury, both while exercising and in your day-to-day life.

Nearly anyone can try Pilates, but talk to your doctor first if you have any injuries or health conditions that may interfere with your ability to exercise. If you have the go-ahead, why not give Pilates a try? The exercises are deceptively simple, but doing them slowly makes the activity more challenging.

Turn the page for some simple Pilates moves. Perform each repetition (rep) in a slow, controlled manner. For the workout schedule at the end of this article, count the total reps you do for the different exercises.
**ROLLUP**

A. Lie on your back with your legs together. Relax your shoulders. Inhale as you reach your arms toward the ceiling.

B. Exhale as you slowly start to roll up through the spine in one controlled motion. Keep your chin tucked and back rounded as you reach for your toes. You should feel this in your abs.

C. Inhale as you pull your lower abs in and slowly start to unfurl yourself back down to the mat.

That’s 1 rep.

*If this position bothers your lower back, bend your knees and keep your feet on the floor before starting the rollup.*
A. Lie on your back with knees bent, feet close to your bottom and your hands behind your head.

B. Engaging your abs, lift your head, shoulders and feet off the mat, and slowly bring your right elbow toward your left knee by twisting your upper body to the left.

C. Switch sides as you breathe, twisting toward the right to bring your left elbow toward your right knee.

That’s 1 rep.

**Member tip:**
Per Pilates practitioner and TOPS member Cheri Jackson, use an exercise mat that is thicker than a yoga mat. Your back will thank you!
**LEG CIRCLES**

A. Lie on your back with your legs together. Relax your shoulders. Keep your arms at your sides.

B. Engage your abs and draw your right leg in and up. Straighten it toward the ceiling.

C. Keeping your hips still, make 5 slow clockwise circles.

D. Bring your right leg back to center (as in B) and make 5 more slow counterclockwise circles.

E. Repeat with the left leg. That's 1 rep.

Note: Keep your shoulders and pelvis level on the mat! The position is more important than making full over-the-body leg circles.

**Featuring**

Maggie Thorison, TOPS Wellness Manager & TOPS WI 1535 Milwaukee member
MAKE IT EASIER

If you have back pain or an injury, try placing your hands under your hips. This will relieve a lot of pressure on the lower back.

DOUBLE STRAIGHT LEG STRETCH

A. Lie on your back with your legs straight and feet pointed at the ceiling. Keep your hands behind your head.

B. Inhale as you lift your head and upper back slightly off the mat, drop your chin to your chest and use your abs to slowly raise the legs. Knees can be bent.

C. Keeping your core engaged, exhale as you lower your legs down any amount. Tip: If your back comes up off the mat, you’ll know you’ve gone too far and need to bring your legs back up a bit.

D. Slowly start to raise your legs back up, as in B.

That’s 1 rep.

Turn to the next page for a training program you can do based on your fitness level!
## A Pilates Workout Schedule For You

You can do Pilates on its own, or add it after doing a cardio exercise like walking or jogging. Exercising before doing Pilates comes with an added bonus: Your muscles are already warmed up. Otherwise, do a gentle warmup of walking or running in place for two or three minutes to increase blood flow and mentally prepare for the Pilates moves. Note: If you can’t maintain good form and do the exercises in a slow, controlled manner, stop.

### New to Pilates? Try This Beginner’s Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>Week 2:</th>
<th>Week 3:</th>
<th>Week 4:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do 10–12 total reps of any of the exercises 2 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 10–12 total reps of any of the exercises 3 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 16–18 total reps of any of the exercises 2 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 16–18 total reps of any of the exercises 3 times a week.</td>
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### Practiced at Pilates? Commit to the Regular Exerciser’s Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>Week 2:</th>
<th>Week 3:</th>
<th>Week 4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do 10–24 total reps of any of the exercises 2 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 10–24 total reps of any of the exercises 3 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 24–30 total reps of any of the exercises 2 times a week.</td>
<td>Do 24–30 total reps of any of the exercises 3 times a week.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Pilates can be a great way to slow down and focus on building a stronger, more resilient core. Why not add it to your exercise routine and see how it makes you feel?

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The information presented is educational and may not suit an individual’s particular health situation. Always check with a licensed healthcare professional before beginning a new exercise program.

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Kelly K. James has been an ACE-certified personal trainer since 2007 and is the author of books including *Small Changes, Big Results: A 12-Week Action Plan to a Better Life* (with Ellie Krieger, RD). She’s also a successful “loser,” having maintained a 45-pound weight loss for 25 years.

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