

Postnatal Exercise

by Lauren Young



The Pilates Method is brilliant for postnatal women as physically it focuses on strengthening the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles helping the woman to regain her pre-pregnancy posture and figure. Pilates can also be therapeutic as it provides personal time for the new mother which helps relieve stress, improves self-confidence and increases energy levels.

The Pilates Method is a holistic approach as it aims to strengthen and elongate the muscles of the body while mobilising the body's joints. This helps to alleviate muscular tension that arises from the repetitive physical movement of new mothers e.g. breastfeeding, bending over, picking up and holding a newborn child.

Primarily Pilates during the postpartum period focuses on strengthening the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles, therefore creating support for the spine. During pregnancy, postural changes occur which increases the curve of the lower back and can consequently cause lower back pain. This change in the spine doesn't miraculously disappear after the birth therefore continuing to cause backache to the postnatal mother. During labour, the abdominal muscles are used rigorously to push the baby down. Therefore after labour and nine months of pregnancy the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles are weak and require time to regain their strength.

Pilates also strengthens the shoulders and arms which is important for carrying the newborn child. The Pilates method mobilises the shoulders which helps milk flow and reduces the common pressures associated with breastfeeding (e.g. neck and shoulder pain)

Galileo Vibration Technology, combined with Pilates, enables new mothers to regain their pre-pregnancy body faster. The Galileo provides all of the benefits mentioned above however it also increases the metabolic rate, improves balance and increases the strength and definition of the muscles throughout the body.

How and When To Start Post Natal Pilates

Within a few days of the birth a woman can start doing exercises for the pelvic floor muscles, circulation, breathing, shoulder mobility and gentle neck stretches. If you were doing Pilates during your pregnancy ask your teacher to give you a few simple exercises that you can do in the weeks following the birth. It is important not to overdo it as you will be fatigued as a result of the labour and looking after a newborn child. Obtain doctor's approval prior to starting exercise and build up your exercise routine gradually in the weeks following the birth.

Six weeks following a normal delivery a woman can return to the Pilates Studio. However following a

Caesarean section the woman should wait 10 – 12 weeks prior to returning to Pilates. It is important to remember that a Caesarean is a surgical procedure therefore it isn't necessary to rush back to exercise too quickly. In both cases doctor's clearance is required prior to restarting.

Before commencing Pilates, make sure that you have a 'Rectus Separation Check' with a doctor, midwife or qualified Pilates teacher. This test is done to determine whether you have an extreme amount of diastasis recti i.e. separation of the rectus abdominis muscle (colloquially known as the six-pack). A two finger gap following birth is considered normal. If a gap of more than two fingers is present, your Pilates teacher should give you exercises to help close the gap that you can complete in the Pilates Studio or at home.

If you are starting Pilates with a new teacher question the teacher on their qualifications and their experience teaching post-natal Pilates. It is important that the teacher has had specific training so they can prescribe exercises that are suitable and safe. Equally as important is to find a teacher that you feel comfortable training with and can trust. The teachers of The Pilates Studio Gstaad are qualified to teach women during the pre and post-natal period.

The Pilates Studio has several books for sale if you would like to do further reading on this topic. Please speak to your Pilates teacher as they will be able to recommend the most suitable book title for you.



The Pelvic Floor (La Paroi Pelvienne, Beckenboden, La Parete Pelvica)

The Pelvic Floor is made of layers of muscles that stretch like a hammock across the bottom of your pelvis. These muscles stretch between the pubic bone at the front, the coccyx at the back and from side to side. The Pelvic Floor supports the bladder and bowel in men and the bladder, bowel and uterus in women. Without this muscular hammock, these organs would fall through the opening in the centre of the pelvic girdle.

Not only does the Pelvic Floor support the pelvic organs but the muscles also wrap firmly around the urethra and anus in men and the urethra, vagina and anus in women. Therefore strong Pelvic Floor muscles will give you conscious control when you empty your bladder or bowel.

The Pelvic Floor muscles also work in conjunction with Transversus Abdominis (the deepest abdominal muscles) to stabilise and protect the lower back and pelvic region.

How Our Lifestyles Affect Pelvic Floor Strength

Our lifestyles have had a direct impact on the strength of our Pelvic Floor muscles. Our lives involve hours of sitting and driving, and because of our less than active lifestyles we are not working these muscles to their full capacity. Our ancestors worked the land, squatted and walked frequently which meant that they were constantly working their pelvic floor muscles which maintain their health and elasticity. Unfortunately weakened or damaged Pelvic Floor muscles can lead to problems such as incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse (i.e. where the bladder, uterus or bowel is displaced from its normal position).

Pilates and the Pelvic Floor Muscles

A large emphasis is placed on the Pelvic Floor muscles during a Pilates class as they work with the abdominal muscles to protect the spine during Pilates movements. During your initial Pilates sessions you will be taught how to contract your Pelvic Floor muscles correctly. Therefore during subsequent sessions you will be able to integrate these Pelvic Floor contractions

into the Pilates exercises that you perform. Galileo Vibration Technology is also beneficial for training the Pelvic Floor muscles because sitting on the vibration plate stimulates activity in the Pelvic Floor.

Training your Pelvic Floor muscles can improve your bladder and bowel control but it also offers the following benefits:

- Reduces the risk of pelvic organ prolapse and aids in recovery from prolapse surgery
- Aids in recovery from childbirth or prostate surgery
- It can increase sexual sensations
- Can reduce lower back pain. The Pelvic Floor muscles work in union with the deepest abdominal muscles (Transversus Abdominis) to stabilise and protect the lower back and pelvic region

Pelvic Floor Workshop - October 2009

Please see page 3 for information.

Autumn Studio News

STUDIO CLOSURE DUE TO ANNUAL HOLIDAYS

The Pilates Studio will be closed from 13th - 27th September 2009 and will re-open Monday 28th September 2009.

Anyone needing make or amend appointments during this time may do so by emailing Natasha Lutz: natasha@pilatesgstaad.ch

OPENING HOURS

During the Autumn season, The Pilates Studio will operate from Monday to Friday. Clients wishing weekend appointments may contact the studio and if possible we will do our best to accommodate your wishes.

UPCOMING COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Core Stability Workshops

During October and November, The Pilates Studio Gstaad will be running a series of *Core Stability Workshops*:

Part I - The Pelvic Floor

Thursday 29th October 2009 18.30-19.30

During this workshop you will be taught to identify your Pelvic Floor muscles, and be given specific instruction on how to contract and train them effectively.

(See page 3 for more information)

Part II - Back Care

Thursday 19th November 2009 18.30-19.30

The Back Care workshop will teach you to train your deepest

abdominal muscles (i.e. Transversus Abdominis). It will also cover the best sitting and standing postures for minimising pain and appropriate lifting techniques to avoid injury.

(See page 4 for more information)

The information covered in Part I and II of this workshop series is essential to know for the care and maintenance of a healthy back. Effective activation of both the Pelvic Floor muscles and Transversus Abdominis is important for our long term health.

Both workshops in our Core Stability series are beneficial for back pain sufferers, pre and postnatal women, individuals who would like to improve their posture and Pilates technique, or those people that would like to understand more about their body and how it functions.

If you would like to register, or require any further information about any of the above courses or workshop please contact the Studio on 033 744 1081.

For more information on any of the articles in this issue please contact:

Natasha Lutz
The Pilates Studio Gstaad
Gstaad Palace SPA/Chalet Bärbeli
CH-3780 GSTAAD
+41 (0)33 744 10 81

THE PILATES STUDIO GSTAAD



CORE STABILITY: PART I - THE PELVIC FLOOR

During October and November, The Pilates Studio Gstaad will run two Core Stability Workshops. Part I will specifically address the Pelvic Floor muscles. You will be taught to identify your Pelvic Floor muscles and how to contract and train them effectively.

The Pelvic Floor is made of layers of muscles that stretch like a hammock across the bottom of your Pelvis and they work in conjunction with Transversus Abdominis (the deepest abdominal muscles) to stabilise and protect the lower back and pelvic region.

Our lifestyles have had a direct impact on the strength of our Pelvic Floor muscles. Our lives involve hours of sitting and driving, and because of our less than active lifestyles we are not working these muscles to their full capacity.

Unfortunately weakened or damaged Pelvic Floor muscles can lead to problems such as incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse (i.e. where the bladder, uterus or bowel is displaced from its normal position).

This workshop is suitable for pre and postnatal women, sufferers of back pain, incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse, and women and men, young or old who would genuinely like to improve their pelvic floor strength and awareness.

| | |
|---------------|--|
| DATE/TIME: | Thursday 29th October 2009 18.30-19.30 |
| LOCATION: | <u>The Pilates Studio Gstaad</u> The Gstaad Palace Hotel SPA 3780 Gstaad |
| PRICE: | CHF 50.00 (Includes Information Handout) |
| REGISTRATION: | Required by Monday 26th October 2009 |

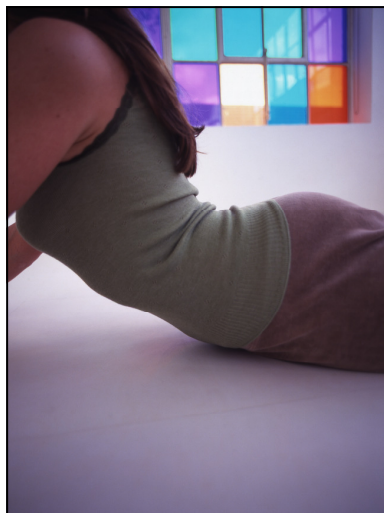
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- This course is limited to 7 participants. This ensures each participant receives personalised attention
- Basic English language skills are required as instruction is given in English

To register or for more information please contact:

The Pilates Studio Gstaad
Gstaad Palace Hotel SPA Telephone: +41 (0)33 744 10 81 Email: info@pilatesgstaad.ch

THE PILATES STUDIO GSTAAD



CORE STABILITY: PART II - BACK CARE

This workshop is a continuation from Part I—The Pelvic Floor. Part II will focus on back care, teaching you to train your deepest abdominal muscles (i.e. Transversus Abdominis) to help support and protect your spine and internal organs. It will also cover the best sitting and standing postures for minimising pain, and appropriate lifting techniques to avoid injury.

This workshop is suitable for back pain sufferers, pre and postnatal women, individuals who would like to improve their posture and Pilates technique, or those people that would like to understand more about their body and how it functions.

- DATE/TIME:** Thursday 19th November 2009
18.30-19.30
- LOCATION:** The Pilates Studio Gstaad
The Gstaad Palace Hotel SPA
3780 Gstaad
- PRICE:** CHF 50.00 (Includes Information Handout)
- REGISTRATION:** Required by Monday 16th November 2009
- ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**
- This course is limited to 7 participants. This ensures each participant receives personalised attention
 - Basic English language skills are required as instruction is given in English

To register or for more information please contact:

The Pilates Studio Gstaad
Gstaad Palace Hotel SPA Telephone: +41 (0)33 744 10 81 Email: info@pilatesgstaad.ch