

Pilates for seniors

The importance of strength and balance

Pilates is a safe and sensible exercise system. It's designed to enhance the quality of movement by improving strength, mobility, posture, balance and mental awareness...

Two areas of focus when designing a Pilates' program for older people are STRENGTH and BALANCE.

As we age it is inevitable that biological changes occur: muscle mass declines; balance becomes compromised, connective tissue wears out and it takes longer to recover from falls or stresses on the body. Medication, and the product of sedentary lifestyles can further compound and create problems. Exercise plays a big part in slowing down these aging processes and Pilates is especially useful because it addresses the specific problems that older populations are prone to. Pilates can be adapted to suit all ages and all levels, so everyone can benefit, no matter what their starting point. It's never too late.

Strength

Muscle mass naturally diminishes with age so strength training is especially important as we get older. Keeping the muscles strong has many benefits. We need our muscles to move and to hold ourselves up. Muscle assists in maintaining good bone health, good connective tissue health, physical strength and balance. People with more muscle mass continue to burn calories 'at rest' so it also plays an important role in preventing weight related disease such as obesity and diabetes. Strength training also triggers a positive biomechanical change in the brain, leading to higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression. In summary, some of the benefits of strength training include a reduction in:

- Arthritis
- Diabetes
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- Back pain, and other aches and pains
- Depression and low self-esteem

A good level of strength helps us to stay healthier, fitter and happier.

Balance

Balance problems are one of the main causes of falls in older people. More than one-third of 65 year olds will fall each year. The consequences can be serious: falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths in older people. Patients on blood thinning drugs and those with osteoporosis are particularly at risk. Having good balance means being able to maintain your body's position and will enable you to:

- Walk without staggering
- Get up or bend over without falling
- Climb stairs without tripping

Good balance is important to get around, stay independent and carry out daily activities.

