



# eat, drink & work out!

how many **classes a week** are optimal, **what to eat** before a class and whether or not to **wear a sports bra**

**Q** I'm new to Pilates and am already hooked, but it's difficult to get to classes during the week. How often should I do Pilates for it to be most effective?

**A** In his book *Return to Life*, Joseph Pilates recommended 10 minutes a day of practice to make effective progress. To insure the benefits of your Pilates practice, it's optimal to take two one-hour classes a week and practice 20 minutes a day, four times a week. For your home practice, you may follow a DVD. Perhaps your instructor can recommend one for you (or check out "Homework," our review section, in the back of every

try a cup of **herbal tea**, **diluted juice**,  
a **piece of fruit** or a bit of **smoothie** before  
your workout to stay hydrated.

issue). Also, as you become increasingly familiar with exercises taught by your class instructor, you can select them for independent practice. Choose four exercises for two weeks of practice. Once you have perfected these four, select another group for your next two weeks of practice. Choose exercises that improve the way you walk, stand and sit: one lying on your back that targets your abdominals; one on your side for toning around your waist; one on your front for strengthening the muscles around your spine that will help you sit and stand tall; and one on all fours to improve your balance. Devote five minutes to each exercise, putting emphasis on the precision of your form and quality of concentration rather than on a specific number of repetitions. Your independent Pilates practice can provide physical as well as mental refreshment.

—Elizabeth Larkam

**How essential is a sports bra when doing Pilates? Is it ok to wear a regular bra?**

For many women, a comfortable sports bra will enhance their Pilates practice due to the improved support for their upper back and chest. The advantage of the sports bra is that it will make it easier for you to create and maintain correct upper-back posture, widening across the front of

your chest and floating your first ribs up. The support also makes it easier to slide your shoulder blades down, away from your neck and ears, avoiding the round-shouldered slump.

That said, in most Pilates mat and equipment sessions, you don't need the kind of support required for running or an aerobic dance class. Most Pilates movements are performed at a moderate tempo in a controlled fashion. Rarely will you be called upon to perform exercises that involve impact. To find out what works best for you and feels most comfortable, try a Pilates session with your regular bra and contrast the feeling with a comfortable sports bra. There's no right or wrong decision, but whatever you do, don't go commando! —E.L.

**I never know whether, or what, to eat before doing Pilates to max out my workout but not make me crampy. What do you suggest?**

The effects of eating before doing Pilates differ from person to person. For me, I feel best when I have a meal or snack of complex carbohydrate with some protein before working out. (My personal favorite these days is kefir on homemade granola with berries.) Now, I can eat minutes before I work out and still feel great, but this obviously doesn't work for everyone. It's important for you to know your own body and respond to

your body's individual needs.

In general, I advise clients to eat a mixed carbohydrate and protein meal one to two hours before working out. Carbohydrates provide energy for glycogen storage and for your workout. Protein doesn't get used during the workout but helps with muscle growth and repair and will help keep your blood sugar levels even. On the other hand, if you've eaten a huge meal, it's best to wait three to four hours. Your body requires a lot of energy for digestion *and* a lot of energy for Pilates, so you won't get your best workout.

While you want to say hydrated (before and during a class), it's difficult to activate your abdominals and pelvic floor if your stomach and/or bladder are full, so find a happy medium. Try a cup of herbal tea, diluted juice, a bit of smoothie or a piece of fruit before a workout to stay hydrated.

If you get dizzy or woozy during or after Pilates, it's probably because your blood sugar (glucose) levels are too low. If that's regularly the case, then you are probably someone who should have a snack or light meal before Pilates.

For almost everyone, it's a good idea to eat something with a carbohydrate within one to two hours of working out to replace the glycogen you used. Good choices include fruit, a smoothie, whole-grain crackers or lightly steamed or sautéed veggies.

—Liz Lipski, Ph.D., CCN