

Pilates by Physiotherapy

Be inspired by the Olympics and get into shape

5 Key Elements of Pilates

Centering

Finding neutral spine position

Firstly you must position your lower back in the 'neutral' position to preserve the natural curve of your low back.

Lie in the rest position, place your thumbs in your belly button, your finger tips on the pubic bones and flatten the heels of your hands onto the bony pelvic bones to form a diamond shape, the pelvic diamond. Tilt the diamond away from you to exaggerate the arch in your lower back, tilt the diamond towards you to flatten your back. Then position the pelvic diamond in the middle of these two positions - this is your neutral spine position

Setting your centre

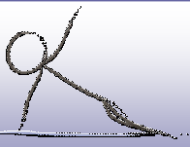
Feel your deep abdominal muscles by placing your finger tips on your bony pelvic bones then slide your finger tips in and down 4cm. Breathe in to prepare, breathe out all the way and before the next breath in slowly and gently draw in the muscle, you should feel the muscle under your finger tips subtly draw away. Hold your centre and breathe normally. Less is better the contraction is very gentle so don't overdo it.

Ribcage Placement

With ideal posture the ribcage should be aligned directly above the pelvis. However many people tend to 'flare' the ribcage in a military type posture. This places stress on the muscles at the back of your ribcage which can lead to tightness, stiffness and pain.

Lie in the rest position, with your arms long beside your body. Find your neutral spine position and set your centre. Breathe in to prepare. Breathe out and lift your arms slowly overhead as far as you can while keeping the back of your rib cage on the mat underneath you. Breathe in and lift your arms, bringing your hands over your shoulders. Repeat several times, without flaring your ribcage off the mat.

Imagine a set of springs running down from the lower bony aspect on either side of your ribcage to the two bony pelvic bones. The tension in the springs should remain constant as you lift and lower your arms.



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Shoulder Blade Placement

Stability around the shoulder blades is crucial for efficient movement of your arms. To feel these muscles and to learn to align your shoulder blades in their correct "neutral" position try the following exercises.

Lie in the rest position, neutral spine and centre set. Keeping your arms long float them upward vertically to the ceiling. Imagine you are holding a helium balloon between your hands. Breathe in and reach upwards through your fingertips, allowing the helium balloon to lift your arms further upwards and glide your shoulder blades gently apart from one another. Breathe out and gently draw your shoulder blades back towards one another.

Remain in the rest position. Breathe in and glide your shoulder blades gently upwards, keeping your arms on the mat. Breathe out and gently glide your shoulder blades down away from your ears.

To find the neutral position of your shoulder blades gently glide your shoulder blades downwards and inwards in the small shape of a "v". You should feel your collar bones widen across the front of your chest.

Head and Neck placement

Lengthening the back of the neck helps to achieve correct alignment.

Lie in the rest position. Lumbar spine neutral and centre set. Place a small folded towel under your head if you feel that your chin is poking upwards.

Feel the bony area on the back of your head resting on the towel. Now lengthen this bony part of your head away from the base of your neck. Hold for 2 seconds and then relax. Repeat several times.

Breathing

Lie in the rest position, folded towel under head if necessary. Place your hands across the lower half of your ribcage with the tips of your fingers slightly interlaced. Breathe in and let your ribs expand widthways. Let your fingertips draw away from one another. Watch that you do not lift your breastbone as you breathe in, instead imagine the back of your ribcage spreading wide into the mat underneath you.