

Pilates Breath

The Importance of Correct Breathing

Proper breathing is essential to any Pilate's routine. Although we breathe automatically, and the way we breathe is a habit we establish over time via our neurological system.

How we breathe is related to our physical state as well as our mental and emotional wellbeing. Apart from helping rid the body of toxins, exercising our internal muscles and elongating the spine, working with our breath helps centre the mind and relieve tension. Not breathing properly while practicing Pilates will result in a half-hearted workout.

How to Breathe Correctly

In his book *Return to Life*, [Joseph Pilates](#) wrote: "Before any real benefits can be derived from physical exercise, one must first learn how to breathe properly. To breathe correctly you must completely exhale and inhale, always trying very hard to squeeze every atom of impure air from the lungs, in much the same manner you would wring every drop of water from a wet cloth."

Our main breathing muscle is the diaphragm which is found beneath the lungs and contracts downwards to bring air into our body. It only relaxes when we exhale. If we are not relaxed in our rib cage area, our bodies retain air which accumulates at the bottom of our lungs and can hinder efficient breathing. By exhaling completely we improve the exchange of good air for bad air and keep our lungs fresh and clean.

Breathing and the Abdominal Muscles

Another good reason to focus on exhaling while doing Pilates is apart from ridding the body of bad air, our secondary breathing muscles, the ones responsible for helping with exhalation, are our abdominal muscles. By fully exhaling, you are also performing a full abdominal contraction. Even without flexing your trunk, when we deflate our torsos, the rib cage and abdominal cavity can descend. This releases the surface abdominals and activates our transverses abdominus, a key core muscle supporting the abdominal wall.

Breathing Awareness

There is no doubt that awareness of breathing can naturally help release tension in the body, rather like a good sigh. When you relieve your body from holding in too much air, you can take a nice deep breath of fresh air and feel more relaxed.

Focusing on your breath will help achieve a sense of ease in your body, one of the principle benefits of practicing Pilates. The key to this is awareness. If we are conscious of our breathing habits we can start to feel how our diaphragm works and how the action of breathing affects the way we use our other core muscles.

Attention to breathing while practicing Pilates will improve your focus and concentration and give a sense of flow and rhythm to your movements. When you're fully connected to your breath, you will feel lighter and the exercises will seem easier. Next time you do your workout, try letting your breath move you instead of the other way around. Experiment and enjoy it. But most of all, remember to breathe!