

Physical Activity for the Mind and Body

It's no secret that regular physical activity can help with weight loss and reduce the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and some cancers. It is not as well known that physical activity helps the mind. Being physically active can reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and increase self-confidence and self-esteem.

Specific types of physical activity have a strong mental focus and keep both the mind and body healthy. The most common of these activities are yoga and Pilates. They require participants to focus their mind while doing the exercises. Yoga and Pilates classes can be found in many fitness centers and studios. Even if you don't live in an area where classes are held, videos are available for home use.

Although yoga and Pilates both focus on the mind and body, they are different. The following will provide information on both types of activities to assist you in deciding which one might be right for you.

Yoga

Though yoga is an ancient practice, its tools are useful for stressful, modern lives. It is a spiritual activity that focuses on a balanced, healthy lifestyle. Along with the exercise, yoga may include instruction on breathing, chanting, or meditation.

Benefits of regularly participating in yoga include:

- Better joint flexibility
- Greater muscle strength and endurance
- Stress relief
- Decreased blood pressure
- Better balance
- Improved concentration



Yoga can range from easy, beginner classes to intense, advanced classes. Different types of yoga have different names. Some names reflect how intense it might be while other names reflect where the yoga came from and its history. It is best to do some research before beginning a class. Ask the instructor or other students about the level of the class or read the back of the videos, and research the name of the yoga at your local library. This will ensure that you are prepared for what the class will offer.

Pilates

Pilates dates back to the twentieth century and is named after Joseph Pilates. He developed this method of activity after a lifetime of studying anatomy, yoga, and body conditioning. Although Pilates focuses on the connection of the mind and body, it also focuses on muscle strengthening and proper body alignment. Pilates is an organized and exact way of conditioning the body,

especially the core muscles which include the stomach and back. The idea of a well-rounded, healthy lifestyle is incorporated; however, it is not the main focus in Pilates. The primary focus is to strengthen and balance all of the body's muscles so each muscle can do what it was meant to do. This results in better posture, proper alignment of joints, and increased ease in performing everyday activities. Pilates can be very challenging, but very rewarding to your health and well-being.

Benefits of regularly participating in Pilates include:

- Better posture and balance
- Better joint flexibility
- Stress relief
- Greater muscle strength and endurance, especially in the stomach and back



Pilates can also range from the easy, beginner classes to more intense, advanced classes. If you are interested in trying Pilates, ask the instructor or other students about the level of the class you plan to take or read the back of videos you might use for more information.

What You Need to Know

- See your doctor before beginning a yoga or Pilates program. These activities can benefit your health greatly, but they also challenge your body. It is important to know your health status when deciding which class and class level is right for you.
- Start with a beginner class or video, even if you are already physically active. It is important to gradually introduce your body to these new activities.
- Consider using a mat or thick towel to protect your knees from a hard floor.

The most important tip is to ask questions about your instructor. Yoga and Pilates are activities that require an instructor with great knowledge about the body and movement to ensure that no injuries occur. Certification for these instructors can last anywhere from a weekend to years. Make sure your instructor is certified to teach the class. For videos, most often the instructor will be described on the back of the video case.

Source: American College of Sports Medicine, *ACSM Fit Society Page, Spring 2005*. Available online at: <http://www.acsm.org/health+fitness/pdf/fitsociety/fitsoc0205.pdf>

Prepared by: Lori L. Rice, M.S., C.N.
Extension Associate for Health
UK Cooperative Extension HEEL Program
May 2005

UK
UNIVERSITY
OF KENTUCKY
Health Education
through
Extension Leadership

For more information on health in Kentucky, please visit:
www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL