

Pilates 101: What to Expect

By Jill Wheeler

Since Pilates has made entry into the mainstream fitness world, many people are experiencing Pilates for the first-time at gyms, fitness centers and clubs. There are benefits to Pilates in any fitness program, but for those interested in fulfilling fitness goals, as well as a holistic approach to structural imbalances, injury prevention and spinal health, private instruction is the answer. Advanced Pilates instructor, Jennifer Gerall, owner-director of Pilates, Fitness & Therapeutics, Inc., in Naples, offers such an approach.

Jennifer describes her studio as “a learning center, based on scientific principles”. She explains that “there has to be a willingness on the part of the client to learn about the body and how it functions”. She admits that if someone wants only a physical workout, her studio might not be the best fit. While Jennifer is serious about her practice, she is not intimidating. She aims to provide a practice that is comfortable and client-centered. The appealing aesthetics and expertly equipped studio is the right place to meet diverse fitness and wellness goals. The cornerstone of her practice is ongoing assessment, beginning with a comprehensive health review during the initial session to explore and identify structural issues, limitations, compensation patterns, injury prevention and to establish long and short-term goals.

Mat Pilates, usually practiced in a group setting, uses a person’s own body strength and control while the use of equipment, such as the reformer, adds a variety of exercises and more resistance options. Jennifer keeps the practice interesting and challenging with her fully equipped studio. Her emphasis on the mind/body connection opens her client’s perspective to everyday postural adjustments that support overall spinal health and structural wellness. She provides tools that nurture everyday body awareness.



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A primary goal of Pilates is to balance the spine.

Jennifer describes the four ingredients to developing overall spinal health as: spinal flexion, extension, rotation and lateral flexion. Every session will involve exercises to address lengthening and strengthening these areas. Another cornerstone of Jennifer’s practice is proper foot placement and alignment. She describes the feet as the “roots of the trees” and at this point in our interview demonstrates the slight variations of pronation and supination (collapsing left and right of the arches from the ankle joint) as I stand behind her as she lies on the reformer. The various foot placements she demonstrates are so slight, I would miss them if she didn’t exaggerate them to make her point. She explains how the role of assessment is vital to understanding and breaking down muscular imbalances and compensation patterns that start at the feet, and can be felt as aches and pains in the ankles, knees, hips, back, shoulders, neck and so on.

I, myself, have gotten caught by Jennifer, rushing my footwork, the seemingly “easy” warm up exercises; wanting to get right to the more “challenging”, interesting exercises, only to be apprehended by her watchful and trained eye. Jennifer will not let her clients get sloppy, because then unhealthy compensation patterns are reinforced. This is the benefit of attentive, private instruction.

Jennifer is unique in her Pilates instruction in that she prescribes to a method of quality versus quantity when it comes to repetition. Instead of a standard routine of 8-10 reps, for instance, she will strive for structural balancing and correct alignment for each individual exercise. This is essential for avoiding injury and correcting recurrent muscular misalignments. Each individual’s threshold is different and strength development is a gradual progression. She does not adhere to a one-size-fits-all approach.

Patience is part of the practice. Results don’t happen over night, but when they do they are transformative and lasting. Keep in mind, an open dialogue about your overall progress is paramount. Jennifer encourages this open discussion and recommends six sessions, closely scheduled, to learn the basics, establish a foundation and begin to feel the positive changes Pilates can offer.

Jennifer is a wealth of knowledge regarding health and wellness-related issues as well as Pilates. If you want to count and name all of the abdominal muscle groups (there are five of them), see Jennifer. If you want to get acquainted with all the muscles in your feet by name and to where they attach, ask Jennifer. If you want to see the magic a piece of string around your waist can have on your beach-ready body, make your appointment! Pilates with Jennifer will help you meet all your fitness and wellness goals.