



Janell Riedl, Pilates instructor (foreground), and Elise Moore, owner of Midtown Pilates Center, perform movements on the Reformer machine.

Pour on the Pilates

A more fluid alternative to yoga, this exercise strengthens the body through sequences of natural movements.

By Linda J. Sellers
Photo by Collin Andrew
SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

For seven years, Linda Weaver suffered chronic back pain, caused by disc pressure on a nerve. She tried everything from physical therapy to acupuncture in her search for relief.

Surgery was an option she didn't want to consider. After nine months of private Pilates sessions with Elise Moore, owner of Midtown Pilates Center, Weaver says she was pain free.

"Elise has given me my life back," Linda says. "It's not a quick fix, but it's worth the effort."

If you're like most women, you've heard great things about Pilates. You're curious, but maybe hesitant to spend \$80 on personal training sessions without knowing more. Until you see it or try it, Pilates may be hard to visualize. Yet it's just a new way of doing familiar exercises.

Although Pilates is designed to stretch and strengthen core muscles between the hips and shoulders, it also works arms and legs. The underlying principle is that exercising muscles in combination is a more natural body movement than, say, isolating a single muscle through lifting weights.

"When you think about how we played as kids, we rolled around, we jumped, we stretched and moved our whole bodies.

As adults we lose that," says Elise. "If you go back to that kind of movement cycle, you're so much stronger."

Fluid, natural motions

Pilates is sometimes compared to yoga, but while yoga focuses on holding a certain body position, Pilates is more fluid, with greater range of motion. There also are two ways to practice the work: on a mat on the floor with props, or on a machine called the Reformer. Both methods are popular, and women often combine exercises from both types.

Don't be intimidated by the name or the fact that it's a machine. The Reformer has a simple design, featuring a padded platform that slides back and forth on a low-to-the-ground frame. It uses spring-loaded pulleys for tension and can be guided by hand- or foot-held ropes. After a brief session, it's fair to note that the Reformer is smooth and requires little coordination.

The advantage of the machine is that "in addition to using muscles for contraction and relaxation to strengthen them, you're also using intrinsic, deep muscles for core stabilization," Elise says. "And there's over 600 exercises you can do on a Reformer."

Exercises fall into three categories of movement: flexion, or curving the spine forward; extension for curving the spine backward; and rotation for twisting the spine to the side.

"Combining the movements is ideal because you get the most strength from three-dimensional movement," Elise says.

Basic training

Instructors typically require beginners to start with two private sessions to learn the basic principles and breathing techniques before they join a class.

The private sessions also are an opportunity for the instructor to become aware of an individual's injuries or limitations and adapt a program to the client's body. Private sessions range from \$40 to \$60 per hour, depending on how many you buy at once.

Midtown Pilates Center at 1680 Willamette St. in Eugene offers a duet rate of \$70 per hour. Movement Studio, across the street from the Downtown Athletic Club, offers small group sessions — two to three people — for \$25 per person. Balance Point Pilates at 2933 Central Blvd. (off Spring Boulevard) in Eugene currently has a special of three private sessions for \$99.

Mat classes at Midtown are the most economical at \$12 per session. Reformer classes are smaller — because the machines take up space — so the cost is higher, averaging around \$17 a session.

"You don't progress as fast in a group class," says Marilyn Hinson, manager of the Movement Studio. "But there's an energy that's fun and vibrant."

People who teach and practice Pilates claim it is much more than exercise. "It's a mind/body connection," Marilyn says. "It's a philosophy and a way of life. After you practice Pilates for a few weeks, your body is different."

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Sampling of Pilates classes in Eugene

- Midtown Pilates Center, 1680 Willamette St., (541) 465-1680 (mat, Reformer, gyrotonics)
- Movement Studio/Downtown Athletic Club, 999 Willamette St., (541) 484-4011 (mat for members only, Reformer, gyrotonics)
- Balance Point Pilates Studio, 2933 Central Blvd., (541) 543-6820 (Reformer only)
- Carpe Diem, 436 Charnelton St., (541) 684-0577 (Reformer only)
- Some local gyms also offer classes.

Gyro-what?

For the even more adventurous, the newest twist in workouts is gyrotonics, done on a machine called the Gyrotonic Expansion System, which defies description. The workout shares similarities with Pilates, incorporating movement from yoga, dance, gymnastics, swimming and tai chi.

In addition to conditioning muscles, gyrotonics strengthens connective tissues in the joints of the body with circular movements and expansive stretches. The workout is done under the supervision of an instructor and is priced about the same as a private session. Midtown Pilates Center and the Movement Studio both offer gyrotonics.