

# TENPILATES: THE WORKOUT FOR THE WAY WE LIVE NOW



by Lucy Fry

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Here's a question: if you were stranded on a desert island and could have access to just one piece of workout gear, which one would it be? More importantly, what kind of factors would influence that choice?

A pair of running shoes might be a good option (running is, after all, a great way of getting around, reducing stress levels and releasing endorphins). But on its own it is likely to cause overuse injuries and doesn't increase bone density as much as, say, weight training. A couple of dumbbells however might not challenge your core and stabilizer muscles enough.

The Pilates Reformer on the other hand? Now that really is an omnipotent piece of kit... I'd go so far as to say that it's the god (or goddess) of fitness equipment, and the one best suited to any kind of training-related monogamy.

The Reformer is used in both Classical and Dynamic Pilates, two different variants of an exercise system renowned for facilitating huge improvements in posture and core strength.

As the nation with the longest working hours in Western Europe, the amount of time most of us spend sitting at a desk and/or computer reduces the rate of blood flow and is obviously unhelpful in our quest to fight obesity. What's more, we tend not just to sit too long but to sit badly, hunching over our desks, causing a rounding of the shoulders and a tightening in the chest muscles which almost invariably leads, at some point, to back and neck problems.

But, thanks to Pilates, it's not all doom and gloom; there's something you can do to improve the situation. But, which type should you choose and what are the differences between them?

In simplified terms, the Classical approach is exceptionally methodical, focusing on achieving total precision through a limited number of repetitions. It's usually taught in a 1-2-1 setting and remains truer to the original set of exercises and, whilst this is undoubtedly excellent if you have the time (and the money, since 1-2-1 sessions are invariably more expensive), it's not necessarily best suited to busy, stressed Londoners.

Dynamic Pilates refers to a slightly less pure and as the name suggests, more dynamic, form of the discipline. It combines classic Pilates moves with elements from circuit and weight training, and if you fall out of good form, you can just reset and continue with your repetitions, thus pushing your body closer to its limits and arguably getting faster results.

Dynamic Pilates gets speedily to the core (literally) of the issue by disabling you from taking any short cuts or relying on the bigger muscles to do all the work but instead activating all the little stabilizer muscles situated close to the bigger ones. Not only will any weaknesses of problem areas quickly be highlighted, but in this way the Pilates Reformer bed works to improve the participants' balance as well as reduce the risk of injury in the big muscles (like the quads, calves or hamstrings for example), and as such falls under the umbrella of 'prehabilitation' ('prehab' for short).

In essence Dynamic Pilates retains much of the precision of Classical Pilates whilst being as beginner-friendly as mat Pilates (albeit, I'd say, with a lot more chutzpa than its floor-based counterpart). But because of the controlled nature of the movements it's unlikely that you will end up with cheeks like strawberries and a brow dripping in sweat, making it far easier to slot a 45-55 minute class in around a busy day at the office.

Another very powerful and, I'd argue, underrated benefit of Dynamic Pilates is its focus on extension work (pulling back the shoulders and stretching the chest while activating the core so you can carry yourself better).

This opening up of the body often encourages an ensuing openness in general to new ideas, other people and change; it has a positive carry-over to the rest of your life. Seriously! Before you dismiss this as hippy nonsense, visualise someone who is doubled-up and round-shouldered; theirs is a posture we associate with fear and anxiety, isn't it? Now visualize someone who stands tall with good posture (regardless of their height); they seem strong, and ready for whatever challenges life throws.

So, does the body follow the mind and heart, or the other way around? It can work both ways, I'd say. But by practicing it regularly, I'd be willing to wager that Dynamic Pilates will change something more than just your reflection in the mirror and what's more, it'll do so quickly and without demanding too much of your time.

Unless you're a full time athlete or the royalties on your 1990s top-ten single keeps you bankrolled, the chances are that you just don't have enough hours in your week to fit in a run, cycle, swim plus a strength, power and speed session alongside your work and play.

What I'm saying is don't worry about it so much; as long as you ensure you get your glutes down to a Dynamic Pilates class an average of 3 times a week you can remain confident that your body will stay healthy, inside and out because it's cardiovascular and musculo-skeletal systems are being challenged all the time.