



What's In A NAME?

By Catherine Isaacson

Likely you've heard about it, and perhaps are even practicing it. It's Contrology – an exercise program that leaves you feeling energized, mentally stimulated and physically refreshed, with an overall sense of well-being. More specifically, it's a precise system of full body conditioning and apparatus created specifically to fully engage the body and mind, improve strength, stamina, flexibility and stability, and also used as a form of neuromuscular therapy to help speed recovery of soft tissue injuries.

You haven't heard of Contrology? Maybe you're more familiar with its current name – Pilates – in honor of its creator, Joseph H. Pilates, who developed it in the 1920s and devoted his life to it until his passing in 1967 at age 87. I'm referring to the original Pilates method based entirely (in its integrity) on Joe's Contrology system of body conditioning – usually referred to as “authentic,” as well as “classical,” “true,” or “pure” Pilates.

Joe Pilates, a frail, asthmatic child who also suffered from rickets and rheumatic fever, dedicated himself to physical conditioning, and gained proficiency as a body builder, boxer, and gymnast and self-defense trainer. In addition to developing unique fitness routines, while serving as a nurse in an internment camp, he also designed specialized apparatus, initially to assist his patients with their physical conditioning, even though many were confined to a bed or wheelchair. The broad range of apparatus he developed is as effective today as when he designed his first models – still used in authentic Pilates' studios with virtually no changes. His unique apparatus, which include the Reformer, Cadillac, Wunda Chair, Ladder Barrel, Pedi-pole, Spine Corrector – and lesser-known ones such as the Foot Corrector and Neck Stretcher – were carefully conceived to ensure every user (regardless of physical condition) is properly

aligned and able to move precisely (with instructional guidance) through the movements, safely, often with adjustable resistance, and always with a particular rhythm and flow.

Equally important, the user is guided by an authentic Pilates instructor (rigorously trained and certified in the authentic Pilates method) who tailors the workout to each individual. The user learns to discover and strengthen his/her “Powerhouse,” (sometimes also referred to by other disciplines as the “core muscles”), to effortlessly activate his/her limbs and progressively obtain the range of benefits authentic Pilates is recognized for.

So what's in a name? Originally the term “Pilates” was a registered trademark of the Pilates Studio in New York, where authentic Pilates (firmly rooted in Contrology) was practiced and taught under the guidance of Romana Kryzanowska, (former Balanchine dancer and protégée of Joe Pilates.) But a class action suit in 2000 resulted in a finding that although the term “Pilates” had been uniquely associated with the continuance of Joe's Contrology system of exercise, it had not always been used in accordance with trademark law – so the name moved into the public domain. As a result, all sorts of trainers use the term “Pilates” today, whether or not they were students of Joe's full method. Some mix it up as a fusion with other health and fitness routines, and/or their training in exercise science and even chiropractic. Some lay claim to “evolved” techniques and equipment that they claim Joe himself would have continued to do if he were still alive. Some have a mix of incomplete training or a variety of piecemeal “Pilates” certifications in areas like “Reformer,” “Chair Class,” and “Mat Pilates,” – with no comprehensive training and certification in the complete authentic Pilates method; partial training or, worse, even no formal

Pilates training at all – authentic or otherwise – yet they can all legally use the term “Pilates” for what they provide. Joe Pilates had stated that if Pilates is not performed precisely as he conceived it, its full benefit will not be realized and one could be injured.

[It is not the focus of this article to suggest only authentic Pilates will provide a valuable range of benefits to health practitioners. But when an exercise methodology bears little resemblance to the comprehensive teaching, apparatus and methodology created by Joseph H. Pilates (whose proven form of conditioning, rehabilitation and instruction works to perfection in its authentic form), isn't it confusing to also call everything, whether authentic or not, “Pilates?”]

So what is “Authentic Pilates?” It is fully rooted in Joe Pilates' complete Contrology system of body conditioning and original apparatus; grounded in working from the center out – versus isolating the limbs. Further, it is not simply a series of movements, nor is it a fitness regimen one learns from a book, a weekend workshop or fragmented certifications from a variety of certifications centers. How can one fully understand or teach the Pilates method of total mind and body control having only learned to work with bits and pieces of the original method? With authentic Pilates, the entire body and mind is engaged and controlled from the “powerhouse,” with the practitioner first visualizing and then effecting the movement by harnessing this core energy. One learns it progressively, in stages, to perfect the movements and posture, concentrating first on how to discover

and then harness the “powerhouse,” while applying the Key Principles: Centering, Alignment, Concentration, Control, Precision of Movement, Breath and Flow. As the method is fully understood and realized, it transcends the sessions, becoming integrated as a state of being and a way of moving through life naturally.

Knowledgeable guidance is key to ensure precise control, perfect alignment and safety if the user is to maximize performance and benefit. Therefore, to be certified, an authentically trained Pilates instructor must first learn all the apparatus, over 500 exercises and 1000 combination of movements flawlessly, moving through a series of levels of achievement where performance, application and teaching technique can be demonstrated perfectly through written, oral, performance and instructional observation tests. A properly trained and certified authentic Pilates teacher tailors instruction to the individual to help optimize mental and physical acuity, enhancing concentration, total body performance and overall conditioning - regardless of the individual's age or physical condition. The knowledge and ability to apply the methodology to ensure consistent and effective results continues well beyond certification itself. What sets one instructor apart from the next includes hands on experience gained through years of teaching all cross-sections of the population – instructional capabilities that exemplify knowledge, reliability, integrity and compassion.



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The authentic instructor also learns how to apply the method to safely improve problems associated with poor posture, back and neck pain, stress, obesity, fibromyalgia, herniated disks and similar conditions. Authentic Pilates is certainly not a “cure-all,” nor is it considered “physical therapy”; however, it is a proven form of neuromuscular therapy that works through body-conditioning – conceived first and foremost to “do no harm,” restoring the body’s natural balance while providing outstanding benefits. Used to assist in rehabilitation, the authentic method doesn’t focus on the physical problem, such as an ankle sprain, but rather first works everything else around it. Progressively, with the blood flowing and the breathing energizing the healing process, only then is the problem area addressed.

Consider my own case-in-point: After discovering that authentic Pilates’ workouts helped me reduce and eliminate the pain of fibromyalgia and improve a debilitating herniated disk condition, I devoted myself to the authentic method. I became one of only 50 worldwide to be trained in the independent study program with Romana Kryzanowska (the recognized authority in authentic Pilates.) Certified by Romana, I went on to operate my own studio, CENTRE PILATES® in Newtown, Pennsylvania, a decade ago.

Then two years back, I injured my right shoulder (rotator cuff muscles and tendons torn and disconnected from the humerus) when I was pinned to the bottom of the ocean and twisted about in a powerful vortex. My deep concentration enabled me to reach out with my left arm in the rip tide to pull myself out of the vortex and back to safety. Had I not taken action, I would surely have drowned. I was quickly scheduled for surgery and subsequent passive physical therapy – yet despite my post surgical healing process, just two days after surgery I was able to conduct private and group sessions – though with my arm immobilized in a sling and my shoulder painfully frozen in my neck. I also immediately worked out my entire body (except for my right arm and shoulder) to boost the healing process and keep the rest of my body and mind healthy.

The prescribed three months of total immobilization of the arm and painful passive physical therapy was subsequently

deemed “useless” by the same surgeon. I wound up with a frozen shoulder and 25 percent ROM (range of motion) on external rotation. My surgeon insisted on a second surgery, but with no guarantee this time that I would regain more range of motion and might even have worse mobility in my arm.

Since Pilates is a way of life for me, this time I chose to take control and began self-rehab using my knowledge of authentic Pilates, with none of the pain my physical therapist insisted was necessary and made me endure. In less than two weeks my shoulder fell back into place and my frame once more became balanced and even.

Bottom line – though I also integrated a couple of traditional physical therapy movements, I gradually regained full shoulder rotation /arm movement mostly as a result of my authentic Pilates training – even though my original surgeon, a second highly respected surgical consultant and two physical therapists, all insisted regaining full motion was unlikely, and that surgery and conventional physical therapy was my best option. My authentic Pilates training certainly served me well as a springboard in my rehabilitation.

When Joe Pilates made the claim, “You will feel better in 10 sessions; look better in 20 sessions; and have a completely new



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body in 30 sessions,” it was neither a simple boast nor a sales pitch. He was referring to the benefits clients actually obtained who performed three one-on-one sessions under his guidance each week, using his specially designed apparatus – the same equipment and instruction one would expect to receive today with authentic Pilates. Similarly, just as a following of famous dancers, such as Martha Graham and George Balanchine, and later, athletes and performers, became devotees of Joe’s

Contrology method due to its effectiveness, numerous celebrities and athletes today (such as DiCaprio, Jessica Lange, Julia Roberts, the Cincinnati Bengals, NYC ballet and many others too numerous to list) have become devotees of authentic Pilates.

So if you decide to look into Pilates instruction and training programs, check the qualifications of the teachers and the apparatus they use to be sure you receive the proper instruction and the benefits you seek. Not all teachers are created equal. Referrals are ideal. Ask the instructor questions. With Pilates, every movement has a rationale. Though every teacher will reflect his/her own teaching methodology, each should intimately understand the proper sequencing, rhythm and rationale behind the movements and the related benefits. Further, observe the way the instructor moves, since Pilates teaches humans to move with an unmistakable animal grace (rooted in total body control).

Further, try one session. A proficient teacher should be able to evaluate you at a glance when you arrive to determine what specific movements to give you initially, and even more importantly, what not to give you. That first session will let you know immediately what benefits you can look forward to. At the end of the session, an effective workout should leave you feeling refreshed, inebriated and standing taller and lighter on your feet.

Choose wisely. Ultimately, we are responsible for our choices. Gather knowledge – be informed. The quality and longevity of our lives depend on it.



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