

Don't Ignore Pilates to Help Proper Walking Techniques.

By Myra Green

Myra Green is Stott Pilates certified in Mat, Reformer, and small apparatus including the spine corrector, cadillac, stability chair, ladder and arc barrel. She also trained in anatomy and working with people with injuries and health issues. Pilates is a way to positively alter your body and build abdominal strength as well as capitalizing on the mind body connection to reduce stress.

Myra made the career change from social work to teaching Pilates full time when she saw the dramatic changes Pilates can make to your body, emotions and energy.

Good posture is more than appearance and is necessary especially when walking. Posture is dynamic, fluid and changes with movement and standing. Muscle imbalances can be caused by genetics, a medical issue such as scoliosis, stress, an injury, or activities of daily living, lifting heavy loads or sitting at a computer all day. Additionally, poor posture may lead to increased risk of injury, fatigue, difficulty breathing and diminished mobility.

While building core stabilization, Pilates exercises stretch, strengthen and tone the body. In addition, it increases flexibility, coordination and balance; and promises better posture. When the body is in alignment and bones are in the right place, you work effortlessly, move more efficiently and breathe more deeply. Strong abdominal muscles are key to good posture; they support your spine and pelvis. Pilates builds muscle strength equally in opposing muscles while stretching muscles of the back, abdomen, hips and limbs.

When training your client and they want to add walking to their regime, postural analysis will highlight areas of weakness and imbalance, and provide a baseline for measuring progress. Individualized workouts can be designed based on the results of this simple review to restore symmetry and balance, and keep clients motivated.

Suggest to your client to wear clothing that fits snugly so you both can see the joints and muscles. Start by looking forward into the mirror:

Access your client using the following:

1. Is there space between the ears and shoulders?
2. Are the shoulders and hips level?

3. Are thumbs facing forward?
4. Is the space between arms and torso equal on both sides?
5. Do the toes face straight forward?

Then, with a partner or hand held mirror, take a side view

1. Is the head stacked directly on top of the neck with the middle of the ear over the tip of the shoulder?
2. Is the shoulder centered in the socket and not drifting forward?
3. Are the shoulder blades flush against the ribcage?
4. Is the breastbone lifted and open?
5. Is the ribcage stacked directly over the hips?
6. Are the natural curves of the spine maintained?
7. Are the hip bones and pubic bone in neutral alignment?
8. Are the knees facing forward without hyperextension or flexion?
9. Are hips stacked over the center of the ankle joint?

The five basic principles of STOTT Pilates are breathing, pelvic placement, ribcage placement, scapular movement and stabilization and head and cervical placement. All are addressed by the above questions.

Healthy breathing fosters good posture and fluid movement. The pilates breath is three dimensional; the back and sides of the ribcage fill with air on the inhale and the ribs come together on the exhale. When inhaling, the spine lengthens and the ribcage opens out and up. On the exhale the transverse abdominus wraps from back to front like a corset tightening; supporting the low back by stabilizing the spine.

A personal trainer or pilates instructor can offer simple tips to assist clients in getting more aligned. Begin with a simple reminder to consider the head, ribs and pelvis like three bowls stacked one on top of the other. The vertebrae are stacked like cans of soup one on top of the other. Maintaining the ribcage over the hips will support your head, neck and shoulders. Reduced shoulder tension will allow the arms to move more freely. A relaxed arm swing will help generate freer hip and leg movement.

When standing, imagine your pelvis as a bowl of water you keep level. Imagine your shoulder girdle as a suit jacket resting on a hanger. Hands and forearms are like buckets hanging from a yoke, keeping them weighted. If

your shoulders creep up, lengthen your spine with your inhale and lift your chest underneath them. (*Massage and Bodywork Magazine Dec/Jan 2007*)

Walking correctly can relieve back pain and be easier with neutral alignment. Encourage the engagement of the transversus and pelvic floor to support the low back when walking. Imagine walking on railroad ties that are hip distance apart. Stand with knees facing the two middle toes and walk; keeping the chest lifted and the top of the head reaching to the ceiling. Maintaining the abdominal connection will support body weight. Make sure your foot lands heel, ball and then toe falling equally on the length and width of the foot.

Faulty patterns are hard to break but incorporating these simple reminders can increase the appearance of confidence and maintain good posture when taking your workout outdoors.