

## Pilates Tips for Dancers # and for You

A strong but svelte body seems to be a prerequisite for professional dancers. For this reason, dancers have been relying on the Pilates Method of body conditioning for more than 80 years. So many dancers use Pilates, in fact, that it's become a common misconception that the program was developed especially for dancers.

Joseph Pilates, founder of the Pilates Method, was certainly not a professional dancer, nor did he develop his fitness regime particular for dancers. However, anyone who wishes to move with the grace and style of a dancer, and possess a dancer's flexibility and strong, sculpted muscles, will find the Pilates Method to be the perfect choice.

If you know a professional dancer, ask him or her to name a few favorite exercises. Chances are, the answer you receive will be peppered with terms like "teasers", "mermaids", "elephants", "boomerangs", "open-leg rockers" or "long spine stretches". These are just a few of the more than 500 Pilates Method exercises that are available to dancers, and those who wish to look and move like dancers.

Professional dancers Martha Graham and George Balanchine first recognized the benefits of the Pilates for dancers. They were the first among the dance profession to realize that Pilates' deliberate and controlled movements, coupled with controlled breathing and a strong emphasis on alignment, could serve to enhance flexibility and strengthen the entire body. The dancers achieved wonderful results: strong, flexible bodies without bulky muscle structure.

Over the decades, countless other dancers would discover the secrets of Pilates. When Emily Gaynor was a teenager studying at the School of American Ballet, she realized after just one month of practicing Pilates that she was getting stronger. Ms. Gaynor found what many dancers before her already knew: that the Pilates Method is the ideal cross-training complement to dance.

Pilates is such a great choice for dancers because it strengthens the powerhouse. According to Joseph Pilates, the powerhouse is the area encompassing the lower back, abdomen and buttocks. This powerhouse, when strengthened, creates a super strong core that supports all the other movements.

The importance of Pilates for dancers is further proven because the system works deep within the body, finding those hard to isolate muscles that are so essential to creating strength and control. The precision and control needed to perform the Pilates exercises requires equal contributions from a variety of different muscle groups, resulting in overall strength and suppleness. In addition, the Pilates Method finds imbalances and corrects them, essentially neutralizing the misalignments that can hinder a dancer's progress. Above all, the dancer is able to perform these exercises in a calm, supportive environment, making it the ideal choice of those who are accustomed to the intensity of many ballet classes.

Pilates for dancers proves to have even more benefits, as it provides an excellent supplement to rehabilitation after injury. For this reason, many physical therapists treating dancers will often have various pieces of Pilates equipment in their offices and clinics. The great ballerina Suzanne Farrell was able to return to the stage after performing Pilates following a hip replacement.

If you are a dancer, or you just want to look like one, consider making the Pilates Method your exercise program of choice.