Pilates & a brief history of

it's origin

*"physical fitness is the first requisite of happiness"*

Pilates is a program of exercise developed in the early 20th century by **Joseph Pilates.**

Pilates called his method **Contrology** as the principals of his work were based on training the mind and body to work simultaneously to control and strengthen the muscles.

### A Brief History of the Man Behind the Method



**Joseph Pilates** 1880-1967

Joseph Pilates was born on December 9, 1883 in Düsseldorf, Germany. His father, a native of Greece, was a prize-winning gymnast, while his German-born mother was a naturopath who believed in the principle of stimulating the body to heal itself without artificial drugs. No doubt his mother's healing philosophy and father's physical achievements greatly influenced Pilates' later ideas on therapeutic exercise.

Small and sickly as a child, he was afflicted with asthma, rickets and rheumatic fever. He quickly became determined to overcome his physical disadvantages. Therefore a young Joseph began to educate himself in anatomy and practiced bodybuilding, wrestling, yoga, gymnastics and martial arts. He soon achieved an almost Adonis-like "anatomical ideal" to the extent that at the age of 14 he was posing as a model for anatomy charts. Eventually his is physique was such that in his public career as a circus entertainer, he used to perform a "living Greek statue" act. He was enamoured of the classical Greek ideal of a man who is balanced equally in body, mind and spirit and he came to believe that our modern lifestyle bad posture and inefficient breathing were the roots of poor health.

## Origins of the Pilates Method

His answer to these problems was to design a unique series of vigorous physical exercises that help to correct muscular imbalances, improve posture, coordination, balance, strength, and flexibility as well as to increase breathing capacity and organ function. He also invented a variety of machines based on spring-resistance that could be used to perform and enhance these exercises.

Before World War I he was touring England as a circus performer and professional boxer and even teaching self-defence to the Scotland Yard police force. This was interrupted when war broke out and he found himself interned in England as an enemy alien on the Isle of Man.

The health conditions in the internment camps were not great, but Pilates insisted that everyone in his cell block participate in daily exercise routines to help maintain both their physical and mental well-being. However, some of the injured German soldiers were too weak to get out of bed. Not content to leave his comrades lying idle, Pilates took springs from the beds and attached them to the headboards and footboards of the iron bed frames, turning them into equipment that provided a type of resistance exercise for his bedridden "patients."

These mechanized beds were the forerunners of the spring-based exercise machines that he went on to build and develop for his studio use such as the Cadillac and the Reformer for which the Pilates method is known today. Pilates legend has it that during the great flu epidemic of 1918, not a single one of the soldiers under his care died. He credited his technique, which he called "Contrology" for the prisoners' strength and fitness.

Pilates returned to Germany after the war, and his achievements with the German soldiers in the prison camp did not go unnoticed, he worked with pioneers of movement technique such as Rudolph Laban who created the system of dance notation still used today.

Pilates decided to emigrate to the United States in 1923. He met his future wife and dedicated teaching partner, Clara, on the boat to New York City. Together they opened the first Body Contrology Studio on Eighth Avenue at 56th Street in Manhattan, in the same building as a number of dance studios. For the rest of his life, he continued to develop his exercise system and to create new pieces of equipment for it.

The earliest American students of Body Contrology were professional dancers, who flocked to his studio following repeatedly injuring themselves and who responded well to Pilates Contrology programme. Soon the famous choreographer George Balanchine, dancer Martha Graham along with other movement visionaries and dancers became devotees to Body Contrology. From there the exercise, but not the name, caught on — everyone seemed to prefer to call it Pilates.

Joseph Pilates died on October 9, 1967 in New York City at the age of 84 and was said to be strong and in good health right up until his death.

Joseph Pilates truly was a man ahead of his time. Today many famous athletes, dancers, models, and actors as well as business professionals have publically endorsed and credited Pilates with positive changes in their lives and this has really created a buzz around the Pilates programme of exercise.

Gentle, effective exercise delivered by a properly trained exercise professional can help with the prevention and management of “Non-Specific” lower back pain. This is why Pilates is recommended by medical professionals, physiotherapists and osteopaths as a highly effective way of increasing both the strength and flexibility of your back and injury prevention.

Pilates is a **body-conditioning** method that works in a different way to other fitness techniques.  Targeting the **deep postural muscles**, it works by building strength from the inside out, **rebalancing** the body and bringing it into **correct postural alignment**. It helps to **reshape** your body, which over time will become **leaner** with lengthened and **more toned muscles.** It will also improve your posture, achieving the perfect balance between strength and flexibility as slow, controlled movements are applied. Pilates is also a great way to relieve unwanted stress and tension. Ideal for athletes looking to enhance their performance and avoid the risk of injury; it is equally suitable for first time exercisers. It's slow, controlled approach means that it gives longer term results and it is especially recommended by medical specialists for those with back problems.  
  
Pilates offers both **mental** and **physical** training, literally teaching you to be in control of your body through improving body awareness and focus. Tension is released from the body and correct postural

Fundamentals of Pilates exercise are applied to each exercise during a session. These fundamentals are: **Breathing, Centering, Concentration, Control, Flow** and **Precision**

"***Breathing*** *is the first act of life, and the last. Our very life depends on it. Since we cannot live without breathing it is tragically deplorable to contemplate the millions and millions who have never learned to master the art of correct breathing"*

**Centering** represents the act of drawing your mental and physical focus during each exercise to the core (mainly Abdominal and pelvic area) of your body also referred to as the 'powerhouse'. As well as finding your neutral posture set up prior to the start of the session and during transitions.

*"****Concentrate*** *on the correct movements* ***each time you exercise****, lest you do them improperly and thus lose all the vital benefits of their value*"

**Control** represents the concept that it is your mind that directs and manages each separate muscular movement... "*Be certain that you have your entire body under complete mental control... good posture can be successfully acquired only when the entire mechanism is under perfect control"*

**Flow** Pilates wrote and taught that his movements in a Pilates class should be connected in a flowing, graceful manner. The intention being that the energy exerted for each exercise should connect all of the body parts smoothly and thereby flow evenly through your body.

**Precision** This refers to the principle that Precise "exquisitely executed" movements are what is important in Pilates over quantity of repetitions performed inaccurately.

"*Contrology exercises build a sturdy body and sound mind fitted to perform daily tasks with ease and perfection as well as to provide tremendous reserve energy for sports, recreation and emergencies"*

*These quotes go to prove just how important the mind-body connection was to Joseph Pilates as he constantly refers to this in the benefits of his program.*