



Cross Training with Pilates

Throughout the course of a week, athletes and fitness enthusiasts workout and practice their sport for hours and hours leading up to a big event. How many strides does a runner take training for a marathon? How many strokes does a swimmer take practicing for that next meet? How many miles will a cyclist travel endlessly pedaling and hunched over his bike before the next race? All of that preparation can lead to overuse injuries that leave us on the sidelines frustrated and anxiously wishing we were participating and not just watching!

So, what is an overuse injury and how do they occur? When we ask our bodies to repeat the same movement pattern over and over trying to perfect our technique we can create muscular imbalances. Often poor training techniques and poor form also contribute to overuse injuries. The muscles we use to perform our sport become very strong and tight. The muscles that aren't utilized as much become overstretched and weak. When we continue to exercise and practice despite these muscular imbalances we can end up with overuse injuries. For the runner, hamstrings, calves and the iliotibial band (IT band), as well as the hip flexors become very strong and tight. The swimmer develops very strong shoulders, low back and hamstring muscles that can become too tight. And the cyclist develops strong quadriceps as well as hip extensors and chest muscles become too tight because of their seat on the bike. So, how can we prevent these injuries? The answer is to cross train.

By cross training we give our over worked muscles a rest and ask those under utilized muscles to kick in. Pilates is an excellent choice as a cross training option. Some of Joseph Pilates' (yes, he was a real person) first clients were the elite athletes of his day trying to improve their performance and prolong their careers. Injured dancers with potentially career ending overuse injuries found him trying to heal their bodies and restore fluid movement. A good pilates program will increase your core strength which is where all of our balance and power starts. It will balance muscular strength and improve your flexibility. A well trained pilates instructor will correct poor form and teach you awareness of the muscles that should be firing to give you proper form. Cross training can also help you stay in shape during the off season. By resting the body from its usual training program, we can work on areas of weakness when there isn't such a push to peak at a certain point. It also adds variety. When we do the same exercise program or practice the same things over and over our bodies become very adept at performing that task and we quit making the gains we want. Any



change in movement pattern will require different muscle recruitment and we are once again making gains and seeing the results we want.

While pilates matwork is well known, did you know that it is also the most difficult exercise program within the pilates repertoire? And while some of the exercises can *look* rather easy they can be very difficult to perform correctly when you focus on using the right muscles. Joseph Pilates designed a series of machines to help individuals strengthen the muscles they would need to perform the matwork correctly. Within a pilates studio there are a variety of exercise machines which we train our clients on depending on their needs and goals. The Cadillac was originally designed to rehab injured World War I veterans who had been confined to bed for long periods of time and had to strengthen muscles wasted from atrophy. It is rather intimidating looking with all of its springs, pulleys and bars, but is an extremely effective piece of equipment to rehab overuse injuries and increase athletic performance. The pilates Reformer is the most well known piece of equipment and is used with clients of all ability levels to correct postural issues, increase core strength and provide a full body workout using legs, back, chest and arms all while challenging the core to keep you stabilized on a moving carriage. You exercise on the reformer laying down, sitting up and even standing on the carriage and keep the body balanced throughout your workout. Joseph Pilates designed the Stability Chair for clients to be able to workout in the privacy of their homes. It requires more strength than the other pieces of equipment and also provides a full body workout while increasing core strength and stability with a compact piece of equipment. You will also see barrels (arc barrels, spine correctors and the ladder barrels), which are used to increase core strength, work on back strength, rotation and flexibility as well as increase core stability. Within the pilates repertoire there are over 500 exercises that are practiced on the floor and on equipment ranging from basic to extremely advanced. Every single exercise should be practiced with focus and control. One can easily cross train by choosing to workout on different pieces of equipment or focusing on certain aspects of an exercise to complement your regular training program. Joseph Pilates believed the mind controlled the muscles. He designed an exercise program and the equipment needed to help athletes excel at their sport, help ordinary people stay fit and healthy, as well as rehab the injured so they could return to life functionally fit.

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