

Pilates: Fact Dispels Fiction

By Ken Endelman, CEO of Balanced Body, 1-800-PILATES www.pilates.com



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Pilates continues to soar in popularity. Yet some of your members may not believe Pilates can benefit them personally. Educate them by dispelling some common myths about Pilates:

Myth #1: Pilates is not for men.

Mistakenly stereotyped as exercise for women, Pilates was originally designed by a man, for men. Joseph Pilates developed the regimen during a career that included stints as a boxing coach, martial artist and athletic trainer. Despite this history, Pilates has gotten off to a slower start with men. "In general, men don't try things until they see other men doing it," says Gerard Hinderlich, owner of Spectrum Bay Club's

Pilates Revolution studio in El Segundo, CA, "I have a class with guys in it and now others are asking about it. It's the best exercise for men because it increases their strength, flexibility and agility."

Tell your male membership that Pilates will greatly enhance their athletic performance, by improving their strength and flexibility. Golfers will hit the ball farther. Runners will run longer and they'll do it without pain. Professional NBA and NFL sports teams — including the New Jersey Nets, Minnesota Timberwolves and Tampa Bay Buccaneers — now use Pilates as an essential part of their conditioning.

Valentin, owner of The Pilates Body by Valentin in Pleasanton, CA,

has taught a men-only Pilates class for the past year.

"I have cyclists, skiers and other athletes in my class," she says, "They've seen improved performance in their specialties and in other sports, too."

The truth: More men discover the benefits of Pilates every year. Market Pilates classes to your male membership. You'll increase your program's momentum, and spur positive word-of-mouth among your male club members.

Myth #2: Pilates is not challenging enough.

For decades, a traditional workout consisted of lifting weights, running hard, and getting sore —the classic "no pain, no gain" mentality. Pilates is different, focusing on quality and precision of movement rather than the quantity of repetitions. Nonetheless, it's a thorough full-body workout that'll challenge even your most fit members.

"It's tremendous conditioning, but different than people are used to. Pilates demands that you concentrate on each movement," says Stacy Sims, owner of Pendleton Pilates in Cincinnati, OH, "If you like to 'check out' mentally while exercising — for example, with headphones on the treadmill — it may not be for you. But if you focus on performing the exercises correctly, you'll definitely feel like you've had a good workout."

The truth: For members willing

to rethink the "no pain, no gain" approach, Pilates provides no-nonsense, full-body strength and agility training. It delivers results, often with decreased potential for the strains and soreness that inhibit progress.

Myth #3: Pilates is too hard.

This misconception stems from the fact that many clubs offer free mat classes as a springboard to fee-based Reformer classes. This can create an incorrect perception that matwork is an introductory form of Pilates. In reality, Reformers provide support and resistance for the exercises, so matwork can be more difficult.

Ensure that your mat classes aren't overly difficult for beginners, which can turn them off to Pilates entirely. Your instructors must be well-trained in modifying exercises appropriately for various fitness levels. Two possible approaches:

1. Offer a mat class geared to beginners, rather than just offering open-level classes. Beginners will be comfortable with their peers and your instructor can modify exercises appropriately for the group.
2. If you can't offer beginner classes, instructors must ensure that no participant is discouraged, and that everyone is having fun. "If you lose people in mat classes, it's because the in-

structor hasn't grasped how to modify the exercises to meet each participant's needs," says Valentin, "If taught right, mat classes are enjoyable and effective."

The truth: With proper training in modifying exercises to meet individual needs, your Pilates instructors can increase member satisfaction and enjoyment, and improve retention rates.

Myth #4: Pilates is too expensive.

Mat classes are usually free with club membership. And, although the average cost for private Pilates sessions is similar to personal training (\$50 to \$100), the advent of group Reformer classes has made equipment-based Pilates much more affordable. Group Reformer classes average around \$20 a class, but it can be lower. Hinderlich's studio offers a package for multiple sessions that lowers the cost to \$13 per class. In addition, group Reformer sessions (4-10 participants) feel like semiprivate classes. Participants get plenty of instructor attention — more "bang for their buck" than in other group classes.

The truth: Pilates mat classes are typically free, and group Reformer classes are becoming much more affordable. Emphasize the extra attention participants get in small Reformer classes, and offer creative package deals to your members. Put energy into dispelling these Pilates myths and your members will benefit along with your club's bottom line. Pilates enhances the health of your members and can be a valuable profit center for your club. And that is no myth.

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