A Journey through Pregnancy
Practicing Pilates

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Abstract

From the very start of pregnancy the body starts to change pretty significantly, and quickly. Being pregnant and the actual birthing process are two of the most important things any woman’s body will go through in her life; both of these things need careful thought and preparation. Pilates is one way that can be quite beneficial to preparing a mother’s body to be strong and healthy throughout the months to come. I chose to write my paper on this specific topic, because I myself am pregnant and practicing Pilates throughout my journey.

A major contribution to a healthy pregnancy is good posture. Proper alignment can decrease lower back and neck pain, along with fatigue. By formulating a session using the BASI block system I hope to improve and create healthy posture throughout a woman’s pregnancy; while she is standing, sitting, and even lying down. Pilates can help to improve the effect that pregnancy has on your total body alignment. While the baby is still tiny in the beginning stages; mostly in the first couple of trimesters, the shift in weight does tend to throw off the center of gravity. As the belly grows the pelvis naturally shifts forward and the mother in turn has to readjust her gait in order to keep from toppling over. The focus of pelvic floor stabilization, breath, control, and awareness will help center mom and give relief, both physically and mentally, throughout this stage in her life.
# Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................2  
Anatomical Description..............................................4  
Discussion......................................................................5  
Case Study.................................................................8  
Conditioning Program..................................................9  
Conclusion.................................................................11  
Bibliography..............................................................12
Anatomical Description

During Pregnancy it is important to know that the natural curvatures of the spine that maintain balance shift. Increased levels of relaxin contribute to back pain and symphys pubis dysfunction. SPD is a problem with the pelvis in which the ligaments holding the pelvic bones together gradually loosen to prepare the mother for labor and birth, but this comes with extreme amounts of discomfort. It’s very important as an instructor to know these things going into a session with a pregnant client.


**Discussion**

Pregnancy is a joyful time in a woman’s life, but it does come with its not so enjoyable moments. There is a long list of why Pilates is such a great regimen to keep up with during and after pregnancy. Pilates can aid in strengthening the transverse abdominis and to maintain a strong pelvic floor, it can also help with breath control and overall assist in achieving less discomfort due to muscle and skeletal issues.

A stronger transverse abdominis will help to prevent Diastasis Recti, DRA is the separation between the left and right side of the rectus abdominis muscles (six pack). 66% or women with diastasis recti have some level of pelvic floor dysfunction. Diastasis recti and pelvic floor problems tend to go together. Some would go as far to say that you should absolutely not work the abdominals during pregnancy, but it’s important that you do. It’s a matter of “how” you activate the abdominals and which ones you are focusing on. Women should center their on the Transverse Abdominals and lucky for the pregnant moms out there Pilates does just that. Forget about the “six pack abs” just focus on using your abdominals isometrically and imagine “lacing up the internal corset”. Strengthening the Transverse will help prevent Diastisis Recti, and hopefully alleviate any pain caused by SPD. Every mother out there should be aware of both these condition to help protect their bodies from injury.

The Pelvic Floor muscles are very important and most women don’t even think about those muscles the way they should. Everyone has heard of the “kegal exercise”, but the misconception is that it only tightens the inner walls of the nether regions, but it does so much more. The main function of the pelvic floor is to actually support the organs that we house in the lower abdominal space. The growing uterus relies heavily
on the pelvic floor more and more for support as the week go on, which is why it is very important to strengthen it. Pilates can help educate women on the “feeling” of contracting and releasing the pelvic muscles; with this exercise it ensures that the pelvic floor becomes both strong and flexible to manage the upcoming stress of child birth. Strong pelvic floor is not only important during pregnancy, but after birth as well.

Just Breathe! Breath is so important during pregnancy because as I know all to well your lose your breath doing just about anything. As a normal part of pregnancy your breathing becomes more difficult because of a hormone called progesterone, this hormone causes a woman to breathe in more deeply, and it may make you feel like it is harder to take in air. Breathing also becomes more difficult because as the uterus enlarges it takes up more space, resulting in pressure against the diaphragm. Pilates breathing helps to get oxygen to the brain, it allows you to slow down and relax. Breathing improves circulation and nourishes the body on a cellular level. Allowing a pregnant woman to tap into her breath can help lower stress on both the body and mind. Pilates breathing can also help to keep the thoracic spine (middle back) flexible and in most cases this area tends to be very tight during pregnancy. If your client learns how to breathe properly it can help in making sure the breath during labor is attainable and effective.

Posture and alignment is obviously compromised during pregnancy as the baby grown and the body has no choice but to alter to make room. Pilates will help to strengthen the stabilizing muscles so that we can attain good posture while pregnant.
Strengthening the muscles surrounding the hips and pelvis will help to make sure there is less discomfort; this in turn will help with any balance issues mom may have. 

Note: before starting any exercise program while pregnant it is important to consult your doctor and make sure you are working with a professional who has experience with both pre and post natal clients.
Case Study

Client is 30 years old, having her second child, and is 22 weeks pregnant. She has been doing Pilates for many years and did so with her first pregnancy. She is at a Fundamental/Intermediate level, although taking precaution to restrictions.

Body Assessment
- Slight lordotic curve
- No sign of Diastisis Recti
- Complaints of minor pains in pelvic floor due to relaxin and stretching of ligaments.
- Dizziness occurs, so take into consideration getting up and down slowly.
- Difficulty breathing

Client Goal
- Improve posture
- Strengthen pelvic floor
- Strengthen TA to improve strength pre and post labor
- Relax
- Achieve higher amounts of energy
- Improve balance
- Stress Relief
**Conditioning Program**

**Warm Up (fundamental)**
It is perfectly fine to be on your back for short periods on time. As long as client feels comfortable and doctor gives ok.
- Pelvic curl
- Supine twist
- Chest Lift (on wedge or small ball right below scapula)
- Chest Lift with rotation (on wedge or small ball right below scapula)

**Footwork (Wunda Chair)**
The great thing about the wunda chair is that it allows client to sit comfortably without having to lie down on their back for a long period of time. No modifications are needed when in this position.
- Parallel Heels
- Parallel Toes
- V Position
- Wide V Heels
- Wide V Toes
- Calf Raises
- Single Leg Heel
- Single Leg Toes

**Abdominals (Reformer)**

**Short Box Series**
- Round Back
- Flat Back
- Tilt
- Twist
- Round About

**Hip Work (Reformer)**
- Frog
- Down / Up Circles
- Openings

**Spinal Articulation (Reformer)**
- Bottom Lift
- Bottom Lift with extension

**Stretches (Reformer)**
- Standing Lunge
Full Body Integration
- Stomach Massage Round Back
- Stomach Massage Flat Back
- Stomach Massage Reaching

Arm Work (Reformer)
Arms Kneeling Series
- Chest Expansion
- Circles Up
- Circles Down
- Triceps
- Biceps

Leg Work (Ankle Weights)
Gluteals Kneeling Series
- Hip Extension Bent Knee
- Hip Abduction Bent Knee
- Hip Extension Straight Leg
- Adductor Lift

Lateral Flexion (Wunda Chair)
- Side Stretch

Back Extension (Mat)
- Cat Stretch
Conclusion

Pilates during pregnancy proves to be very beneficial. Simply put, the stronger the body is going into pregnancy and throughout the many weeks, the stronger it will be after. Basically if you “don’t use it, you lose it”. If you disregard those oh so important Transverse muscles throughout your entire pregnancy it will be harder to reconnect with them once baby has arrived. It’s important to remember that it is not just about the core, we cannot forget about the body as a whole and this is why using the BASI block system to create a structured session is so beneficial to instructors and clients with particular needs. So much of being a mom involves lifting, bending over, getting down on the floor, spending time with back rounded forward (feeding, changing, pushing a stroller, etc). So make sure not to forget all the other muscle groups to prevent tension and imbalances from everyday life as a mom. Pilates proved to be effective in my first pregnancy and this is why it is so important for me to keep it in my daily routine during my second. Pilates is a way for clients to maintain strength, increase mobility, improve posture, and decrease stress. Pilates has been proven to be successful during pregnancy, and by taking into consideration the changes that occur in the body of a pregnant woman, you can design an amazing session that will change your client’s body and mind.
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