Pilates and Healthy Posture

Nazanin Amirghahari
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Abstract

The majority of people begin the early youthful stages of their lives in an optimal physical and emotional state. However, modern life has a way of taking a toll on our bodies and slowly eroding our health. Whether we are hunched over our desks, stooping our necks all day on computers, or our eyes glued to our phone screens, we most likely don’t pay active attention to our posture throughout the day.

This paper emphasizes the importance and benefits of proper posture. It also exemplifies how BASI Pilates conditioning repertoire can strengthen back and abdominal muscles, therefore supporting the spine and enhancing neutral spine alignment. In simpler terms, it prevents slouching and can potentially undo the damage and appease the pain that years of bad posture has caused.
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Anatomical Description: Stomach and

Back Muscle

Deep Muscles
- Splenius capitis
- Splenius cervicis
- Levator scapulae
- Rhomboid minor
- Rhomboid major
- Erector spinae
- Serratus posterior inferior

Superficial Muscles
- Trapezius
- Spine of scapula
- Deltoid
- Infraspinatus
- Teres minor
- Teres major
- Latissimus dorsi
- Thoracolumbar fascia
- External oblique
- Internal oblique
- Gluteus medius
Anatomical Description: Spine

ANATOMIC LANDMARKS

- Posterior to coronal suture
- External auditory meatus
- Odontoid process
- Bodies of cervical vertebrae
- Head of humerus
- Midthorax
- Bodies of lumbar vertabrea
- Greater trochanter of femur
- Anterior to center of knee joint
- Anterior to lateral malleolus
- Calcaneocuboid joint

SURFACE LANDMARKS

- Ear lobe (Tragus)

Ideal line of gravity

Lateral view

Introduction
“A man is as young as his spinal column.” - Joseph Pilates

“Stand up straight,” the advice we’ve probably all heard of.

From the moment we take our first steps, we experience the placement of being in a fully upright position as opposed to crawling on all fours. As we grow and take on responsibilities like school and work, we find ourselves stuck in positions that may seem harmless, but in reality are strenuous on our joints, muscles, facets, and spine. These daily placements can be as basic as sitting behind a desk hunched over with our necks stooped downwards as we type on our computers, staring at our phone screens as we reply to emails, or even driving our cars.

Due to gravity, it is a natural inclination for us to drag our bodies downwards, but aspects regarding the range of motion and strength of our muscles also contribute to the stiffened and stubborn state of a hunched back: “Physical reasons for poor posture include inflexible muscles that decrease range of motion and weak ‘core muscles’ of the back, side, pelvis, and buttocks.” As we get older and begin to feel pain in our bodies, one may feel helpless and baffled at the idea of reversing this lifelong practice of maintaining bad posture; there are simple solutions that can make a world of difference in how we move and feel. These solutions can be as basic as being mindful of our posture in the sense of how we are sitting and standing, not sitting for long periods of time and making sure to take breaks that should include standing upright and walking (enhances your circulation), and limiting the time we spend fixated on our screens as much as possible.
Pilates exercise was founded by Joseph Pilates in the 1920’s. Pilates is a mind-body routine that focuses on core stability, posture, flexibility, strength, breathing, and movement control.

Unfortunately, slouching and gravity can throw your whole body out of alignment and one can benefit with regular BASI Pilates repertoire to establish a neutral spine posture. Pilates changes the habitual posture by strengthening the group of muscles that support the spine, and stretches the muscles surrounding it. Natalie Lovitz PT, DPT, and Clinical Director of Professional Physical Therapy in New York, NY, says “that by limiting pain, alignment faults, and sequel of other injuries caused by poor posture, people are more likely to live an active lifestyle and do so for longer.” Pilates equipment is specifically designed to condition the whole body, which helps to correct the body’s alignment. Pilates conditioning programs propel the process of improving one’s posture and strengthening one’s back and abdomen muscles, which provides a sense of upliftedness.
**Conditioning Program**

Note there are many conditioning programs that can be setup through BASI Pilates block system repertoire, below is just an example of one.

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<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Muscle Focus</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<td>Abdominal, Hamstrings, Abdominal with oblique emphasis</td>
<td>Spinal Articulation Abdominal Strength Pelvic, Lumbar Stability</td>
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<td>Foot Work</td>
<td><strong>Reformer or Cadillac</strong></td>
<td>Hamstrings, Quadriceps, Ankle plantar flexors</td>
<td>Hip extensor strength, Knee extensor strength, Ankle plantar flexor strength, Warm up</td>
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<td>Abdominals</td>
<td>Abdominal strength, Pelvic lumbar stabilization, Shoulder flexor/exten control</td>
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<td>Down/Up Openings</td>
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| Spinal Articulation | **Reformer**  
|:-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spinal Articulation | Bottom Lift  
|                    | Bottom Life w/extension  
|                    | Abdominals, Hamstrings  
|                    | Spinal articulation, Hip extensor strength and control  
| Stretches | **Reformer**  
|            | Standing Lunge  
|            | Hamstrings, Hip flexors  
|            | Hip flexors and Hamstring stretch  
| Full Body Integration I | **Reformer**  
|          | Elephant Down Stretch Reverse Knee  
|          | Abdominal and Back extensors  
|          | Shoulder and trunk stabilization and control, Hamstring and shoulder stretch, Trunk stabilization, Abdominal strength, Hip flexor strength  
| Arm Work | **Reformer**  
|          | (Arm Supine Series) Extension Adduction Circles (up/down) Triceps  
|          | Latissimus dorsi Triceps  
|          | Shoulder extensor and adductor strength, scapular stabilization, Shoulder mobility, Elbow extensor strength  
| Full Body Integration II | **Reformer**  
|           | Balance Control Front  
|           | Abdominal, Deltoids  
|           | Trunk and Scapular stabilization, Shoulder flexor strength  
| Leg Work | **Wunda Chair**  
|          | Hip Opener  
|          | Hip external rotators  
|          | Hamstring control, Hip external rotators, Pelvic lumbar stabilization  
| Lateral Flexion/Rotation | **Wunda Chair**  
|                     | Side Stretch  
|                     | Abdominal Obliques  
|                     | Lateral flexor stretch, Abdominal strength w/ Oblique emphasis  
| Back Extension | **Wunda Chair**  
|                | Swan on Floor  
|                | Trapezius  
|                | Back exten, Shoulder flexor strength  


For my case study I will be presenting myself as the client. I am a 49-years old female with slouching/sway back posture. Since I was young (especially when puberty hit), I started to hunch while I was sitting at school behind the desks and walking, because I was embarrassed of my new body changes. I started doing Pilates sporadically since 2007 (when I was 37-years old), both with mat work and Pilates equipment at various Pilates studios in Ventura, California. At that time my daughter had starting figure skating and she quickly transitioned in the competition world. I decided to take the BASI Pilates course in 2008 only to help my daughter achieve her figure skating goals by mostly practicing mat exercises. As her path changed direction, I was able to purchase my own Pilates equipment and changed my Pilates practices from studios to home, not knowing that this decision changed my life.

Throughout the years, including the knowledge that I have gained from the BASI Pilates course and the books for each Pilates apparatus, I started setting up block systems with different exercises to strengthen my back and core as well as work on realigning my posture.
Results

I have gained strength throughout my body, increased my flexibility, stabilized my scapulars, found balance, and overall toned my entire muscular system. Today, the habit of slouching hasn’t really gone away, but with mindfulness, constant reminders, and BASI Pilates’s exercises, I was able to reverse my posture from sway back to an almost ideal posture. I must say as I practiced on my own weaknesses and analyzed every exercise in the BASI Pilates in all equipments, it has not only helped me with core stability, posture, flexibility, strength, breathing, and movement control, but also using my analysis as cues when I work with others and target their specific needs.
Conclusion

Practicing Pilates, whether through mat work or using the Pilates equipment, have benefited and made a huge difference to my posture, muscular strength and stability, and depth in mind and body awareness.

As we age and life goes on, we are occupied with our daily activities, constantly challenged by battling the crouched and hunched over posture we develop through our daily activities and demands from school, work, or family. Through personal experiences, Pilates has transformed my body’s disposition by giving me knowledge and insight towards being mindful and how to avoid strains on my body by strengthening my back and core muscles. This reverses the natural pull of gravity and therefore will break this harmful habit by developing a healthy and correct posture, which comes with several benefits of its own. Today I know that Pilates can help make your abs and back muscle stronger or give you better muscular endurance in your core, plus it can help you focus, breathe and move with more grace and flexibility. At the age of 49, it feels great to be pain free and capable of pursuing my passion in learning more and more about my body. I hope everyone gets a chance to try the BASI block system to see not only how their body and health can benefit from such a amazing exercise program, but also as one continues the surprising transformation of their body.
Bibliography


