Pilates for Osteoarthritis of
The Hip Joint

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June 1st, 2014
Course Year 2014
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Abstract
Osteoarthritis is a common and affects over 20 million Americans. I recently read an article that intrigued me and led me to research and write about it. In the process I found many references, studies and specific cases on how the method of Pilates is an excellent method and how it has helped so many people overcome the condition and be able to continue an active lifestyle.

I found information about osteoarthritis mostly online; reading about the causes, symptoms, treatments, and people’s success stories through Pilates. There are many therapists, doctors and Pilates studios that recommend Pilates as a treatment and successful ongoing activity to facilitate gaining healthier joints.

Because osteoarthritis affects so many people I wanted to educate myself on it more and understand the cause and treatments for it. I wanted to know what I can do, through the method of Pilates, to help those suffering from this condition.

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Anatomical Description of the Hip Joint

The iliofemoral joint, commonly known as the hip joint, is a ball and socket joint that comes together between the acetabulum of the pelvis (socket) and the head of the femur and the top of the femoral head (the ball). (see Exhibit B). The structure of the pelvis and the femurs combine to make the hip joint very stable. (Exhibit A)
Introduction

Osteoarthritis is a chronic condition that causes breakdown and loss of cartilage in the joint. When breakdown of this cushion occurs it causes the bones to rub together which, in turn, causes pain, stiffness and soreness.
There are many factors that can lead to this condition such as weight, age, prior joint injuries and weakness of supporting muscles like the thighs. Genetics can also play a part.

Symptoms may include soreness and stiffness of the area and tend to get worse especially after overuse. Difficulty walking, climbing stairs, performing other daily tasks and even sleeping are common with osteoarthritis.

Medication can help relieve pain when needed. A doctor may recommend therapy treatments. And when none of these help and the symptoms and pain progress, entire hip replacement may be necessary.

It is important for those with this condition to maintain a healthy lifestyle and diet, including weight management. Excess weight can put three times as much pressure on your joints, so losing weight and keeping it off can help prevent the condition or ease the symptoms of it. Performing muscle strengthening exercises are equally important because strong muscle surrounding the joint helps protect and support it.

Although osteoarthritis can affect other joints, such as the shoulder, knee, or ankle, I’ve chosen to write specifically about the conditions of the hip.

Case Study

A woman named Anne came to me interested in the benefits of Pilates to help ease the pain of her osteoarthritis in her hip. Anne was 55 years old at the time she came to me. She explained that she was diagnosed with Osteoarthritis when she turned 50 and, at the time, overweight. She was unable to perform daily activities and do the things
she loved to do such as gardening, cooking and sit on the floor to play with her young grandchildren. She first seeked help from a chiropractor and when that didn’t help she saw a doctor that diagnosed her with osteoarthritis in the hip. While she found regular exercise helped with her weight, she was not feeling much relief of the arthritis pain and felt it only was getting worse. Knowing that staying active was key to treating the arthritis, she started to do her own research and found a blog from other osteoarthritis sufferers. Several blogs spoke about Pilates and how much it had changed their life. Anne decided to seek out Pilates and thought it might be exactly what she needed. When Anne came to me I could see in her posture that she was suffering with lower back pain, tight hip flexors and a weak core.

BASI Block System And Approach to Anne’s Condition

Warm Up:
We warmed up with a pelvic tilt on the mat and a pelvic curls with a small range of motion.

Foot Work:
I took her over to the reformer to do footwork, and altered the series to avoid any contraindications such as a small V position.

Abdominal Work:
Anne did Standing Pike on the Wunda Chair, and then to the Cadillac for mini roll-ups, again, altering the series to avoid exercises that could worsen her condition.

Hip Work:
We stayed on the Cadillac for Circles with a small range of motion, walking and bicycles.

Stretches:
I had her do Hip Flexor stretches on the Ladder Barrel.

Arm Work:
I showed her arm supine series on the Avalon.

Lateral Flexion/Rotation:
I had her on the Ladder Barrel again for Side Over Prep.

Back Extension:
To finish she did Breaststroke Prep on the reformer long box. She left feeling better mentally and physically after our first session.

She continued to come in 2-3 times a week. We changed up the routine each time by adding new exercises and assists. I added leg work into her routine, performing single leg work on the Cadillac and Reformer as well as Hamstring Stretches in later sessions. She was eventually able to increase her range of motion in some of the exercises and she saw how much flexibility and strength she was gaining by coming in regularly and doing the programs I customized for her. She also suffered less lower back pain and
better posture because with the full body conditioning Pilates provides, she did not have
to compensate for the chronic pain the osteoarthritis in her hip caused.

Anne’s goal was the feel better overall and be able to do her daily activities again
without being in pain and letting the arthritis control her life. I wanted her to leave each
time feeling better, more aware of her body, strengthening her joints and surrounding
muscles, allowing her to stay active and live a normal life.

After 20 sessions, Anne felt better than she had in 10 years and her osteoarthritis was
no longer constantly on her mind or inhibiting her from doing the things she loved to do.

Conclusion

So many Americans suffer from arthritis and osteoarthritis and it is the most common
form. Although there is no cure for the disease, Pilates is an excellent way for sufferers
to stay in motion, develop and strengthen surrounding muscles to the joints, gain
awareness of their bodies. Pilates can be customized to meet the individual needs
with purposeful movement. With the right exercises and attention to the individual’s
needs and limitations, Pilates can transform someone mentally and physically. Many physical therapists and doctors recommend Pilates for arthritis, because of these many benefits. Pilates also allows for specific and focused exercise for any individual’s needs, while providing a full body conditioning to strengthen and support the body as a whole. Closed chain exercises, such as leg and foot work on the reformer and Cadillac minimizes pressure on the joints and are ideal for arthritis conditions. Pilates can allow an individual in so much pain that normal daily activities are physically impossible, to overcome their inabilities and change their life. I want to be a part of that, and can be through practice, research, continued education, and with the tools BASI has provided and taught me.

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