

PILATES

The Balanced Body® Newsletter

CORETERLY



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CLUB SCENE

Where are all the Men?

by Valentin

It is a frequently heard adage, “Pilates is for women.” NOT. There is no doubt that its creator, Joseph Pilates, was a REAL man, who created exercises for REAL men. However, the Pilates world has traditionally been dominated by women. Its evolution in the United States began via the dancer’s world with large number of female participants and mostly female instructors. Recently, coverage in the media, practice by female celebrities and its integration into sports training, have prominently promoted the benefits of Pilates and its acceptance in the fitness arena. Enter the male populace. But how?

Since your existing clientele are your best advertisement, how you sell yourself, your teachers and your studio can positively impact the diversity of patrons: namely, men.

Yes, the demographic in the studio and fitness-based Pilates classes is largely women, but they can be a great resource. They are the ones who will tout your skills to their spouses, partners, friends and, more specifically, their male friends! Your teaching style, terminology, training intensity, competence in modifying exercises for special athletic needs, and understanding of learning styles can impact your appeal to male customers. In addition, your existing male Pilates patrons can vouch for your expertise in areas of particular interest for most men: increased mobility of hamstrings, hip flexors, and low back, to name a few.

Does one teach men and women differently? Is there a difference between male- and female-only classes? Is there a difference in a mixed gender class?

Mixed gender classes and their challenges...

Having had the experience of teaching all combinations above, the answer is “yes.” In a workout, maximal oxygen consumption, muscle strength, speed and power can greatly affect a combined female/male session. During a mixed gender workout, modifications frequently need to be clearly stated to accommodate differences in physical capabilities. In general, this can affect the flow and structure of the class, and can repeatedly distinguish the male participant(s) from the rest of the group. To keep this from becoming a problem, be certain that you’re giving the men enough attention to form, while not ignoring everyone else.

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Men's learning style differs and thus affects how one teaches, cues, demonstrates, verbalizes and fundamentally designs the session, workout, or class. For example, mindset changes dramatically the moment men enter the studio. They are mentally focused for a workout and will typically perform "warm-up" exercises prior to the start of class. Encouraging attention to Pilates principles such as centering, focus, body awareness, and stretching before class is well suited to the practice of Pilates.

Verbal cues for men

When giving a verbal cue that involves the footbar, spring set, body position and choreography, a simple, "Footbar up, red-blue, feet in straps, and 8 reps," works well. Men easily retain that kind of information without need for repetition. Simple, direct and quantifiable cues are best-suited to males. Feedback must be meaningful. Phrases such as "Way to go" or "That was great" are not as noteworthy and almost always result in being insignificant. Some male class attendees have told me they want pointers that will help them improve their practice, not verbalizations that provide no specific information about the exercise itself. Cues and feedback should be remarkable to effectively make a change the next time the same movement is practiced.

Gear it toward everyday activities

Pilates aims toward "functional fitness" which appeals to both sexes, but grabs the attention of men. Emphasize strength, balance, and flexibility in your classes, along with easing activities of daily living. Tailor your classes for men to include exercises that will help them in activities such as yard work, household projects, or even something as simple as tying a shoe. Know how to help them increase performance in recreational sports such as basketball, tennis and golf. Knowledge of exercises to help men in those areas of living, combined with succinct and direct cueing, can strengthen your teaching skills for any population.

When you plan your class, avoid flowery arms and highly choreographed legwork. These do not appeal to men, and can be deterrents in their refusal to enter a class. If they feel like Pilates is a dance class, they won't want to participate. Advertise by demonstrating strong, linear moves that exhibit intensity. It may be more attractive to them and thus produce positive results and increased attendance.

Capturing males to Pilates can be accomplished by tuning your teaching style to accommodate the learning methods of some men. Be creative to develop and diversify your instructional skills to attract the male population.