Mat and Ring
A DETAILED GUIDE FOR PRACTICING PILATES
# Mat and Ring Manual

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## THE PILATES RING

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**Introduction to the Pilates Ring**

**The Pilates Ring**

The Pilates Ring or Magic Circle is a fantastic tool for adding extra strength and stability challenges to a basic mat class. It is especially useful for:

» Isometric toning - Placing the ring between the legs or between the torso and the arms helps to tone the adductors, abductors, latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major and other muscles in the chest and lower body.

» Abdominal challenges - The ring adds a level of difficulty when placed between the legs for abdominal exercises such as the Hundred or the Teaser.

» Pelvic floor toning - Along with strengthening the inner thighs, the ring will automatically help strengthen the pelvic floor when it is used between the legs.

» Variety and fun - The ring is such a great tool for so many things in a mat class that it adds fun, excitement and creative new moves for instructors and students at every level.

**Choosing a Pilates Ring**

The ring comes in a variety of strengths and configurations. We recommend the Balanced Body Ultra-Fit Circle® for general classroom use because it provides medium resistance, is relatively light weight and the handles are designed to be used from both the inside and the outside. For more resistance, you can use the Spring Circles with 3 or 4 bands or the Flex Ring Toner® when a heavier ring is desired. In addition to those made by Balanced Body, rings by many other manufacturers are readily available.

**Ring Safety**

The ring is generally a very safe piece of exercise equipment but you should be aware of the following precautions when practicing with the ring or teaching students how to use it.

» Adductor strains, groin strains, unstable pubic bones or sacroiliac instability - Using the ring between the legs is not generally recommended for any of these issues. Be sure to consult your medical professional before beginning any new exercise program.

» Knee injuries - For some people with knee injuries, using the ring between the legs can be uncomfortable.

» Skin sensitivity - Some students, especially older clients are sensitive to the pressure on their skin. You can try padding the skin or not using the ring if it is too uncomfortable.

» Keep the ring under control - The Ring can roll or spring away from you or your students so be sure to keep good control of it at all times.

**Using this Manual**

This manual contains a wide range of exercises organized by exercise category. Each exercise includes the starting position, movement sequence, modifications, variations, cueing and imagery, purpose and precautions. At the back of the manual are several exercise sequences you can do depending on your goals for the day or the focus of your class. Once you have worked through a few and have a good idea what the Pilates ring is all about, feel free to experiment!
Adding the ring to the Hundred creates many new challenges for this fundamental Pilates exercise.

**Starting Position**

Lie supine with the legs in a chair position and the arms up toward the ceiling. Place the ring between the thighs.

**Movement Sequence**

» Exhale – Roll the head and upper body off the mat as you lower the arms toward the outside of the hips. Straighten the legs and lower them toward the mat as far as you can without moving the back. The torso and the legs move together into the final position. Roll up only as far as the bottom tip of the shoulder blades.

» Inhale – Pulse the arms for 5 counts keeping the torso quiet and the arms straight.

» Exhale – Pulse the arms for 5 counts.

» Continue to inhale and exhale as you pulse the arms for up to 10 sets (100 pulses).

**Variations**

Ring between the ankles: Place the ring between the ankles to make this a little harder.

Ring around the legs: Place the ring around the outside of the thighs or the ankles for a new challenge.

Legs bent with the feet on the floor: For beginners or clients with low back problems, place the feet on the floor to begin.

Legs straight toward the ceiling: Straighten the legs toward the ceiling for a slightly more challenging position.

Legs lowering: Lower the legs toward the floor as far as you can without changing the position of the lower back for the classic Hundred position.

Steering wheel legs: With the ring between the ankles, rotate the ring to each side as you breath in for 5 pulses and out for 5 pulses. Keep the pelvis steady.
Cueing and Imagery

» Lower the legs only as far as the torso can support them.
» Lift the head from the rib cage, not from the neck.
» Keep the torso steady as the arms pulse.
» Keep the elbows and wrists straight as you pulse.
» Breathe smoothly and steadily to maximize lung capacity.

Purpose

» Warm up the body.
» Breathe deeply and fully into the lungs and torso.
» Increase abdominal strength.
» Teach stability of the torso and lower back.
» Teach how to lift the head from the torso in abdominal exercises.

Precautions

For neck and shoulder injuries – Support the head, neck and upper body with wedge pillow or towels, and work the lower body only.

Low back problems – Work with an imprinted spine or use a supported neutral position of the low back. Use one of the leg position modifications to keep the stress out of the back.

Avoid with osteoporosis.

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The ring adds a nice challenge to this traditional mat exercise.

**Starting Position**
Lie prone with the head to one side and the hands lightly clasped behind the back. Place the ring between the ankles with the knees bent.

**Movement Sequence**
» **Inhale** – Bend both knees and kick the heels toward the buttocks 3 times using a sniffing breath. Keep the front of the hips on the mat and the low back stable.
» **Exhale** – Lift the back into extension as you engage the abdominals, straighten the legs and reach the hands toward the feet. Keep the head in line with the spine. Lower the torso back to the mat with the head turned to the other side and the hands clasped behind the back.
» Repeat 4 times.

**Modifications**
For tight lower backs or hip flexors: Place a towel or pillow under the front of the pelvis to decrease the stress in the lower back.

**Cueing and Imagery**
» Keep the front of the hips on the mat.
» Keep the head in line with the spine.
» Keep the abdominals engaged throughout.
» Engage the back, gluteals and hamstring while keeping the torso long and without compressing the lower back.
» Keep the lower legs in line with the thighs.

**Purpose**
» Strengthen back extensors, hamstrings and gluteals.
» Stretch the quadriceps.
» Stretch the chest and anterior shoulder.

**Precautions**
Low back injuries – Engage the abdominals and press the pubic bone into the mat to decrease the pressure on the lower back. If the client still gets a pinching sensation in the lower back, limit range of motion in extension, place a pillow under the hips or avoid.

Knee injuries – Limit the range of motion in knee flexion. Stretching the quadriceps before this exercise can be helpful at decreasing knee discomfort.
Starting Position

Sit with the legs straight and open slightly wider than the hips. Place the ring to the side of the torso with the hand on top of the handle.

Movement Sequence

» Exhale – Press the ring down and elongate the torso.
» Inhale – Lean over to the side reaching the top arm over toward the ring. The bottom arm will bend to accommodate the stretch.
» Exhale – Roll the torso back up to sitting as the elbow straightens.
» Repeat 4 to 8 times to each side.

Modifications

Tight hamstrings: Bend the knees slightly or sit up on a rolled mat, a pad or a small box in order to keep you up on your sit bones with your legs straight.

Variations

Ring between the hands: Hold the ring between the hands and reach the arms overhead. Lean the torso over to each side keeping the torso long.

Cueing and Imagery

» Sit up on the very top of the sit bones.
» Engage the abdominals to lift the pelvis off the legs.
» Keep both sit bones on the mat.
» Sit up on the very top of the sit bones.
» Lengthen the side before leaning over.

Purpose

» Teach axial elongation.
» Learn how to sit up tall with support.
» Stretch the lateral torso.
» Increase the mobility of the shoulder blades.
» Improve pelvic stability.

Precautions

Low back and hip injuries – Use the tight hamstring modification to take stress out of the low back and hips

Shoulder injuries – If the shoulders are uncomfortable, decrease the pressure on the ring or do the regular version.
Strengthen the chest in a variety of positions with this simple exercise.

**Starting Position**
Stand and hold the ring in front of the chest with the hands on the outside of the handles.

**Movement Sequence**
» Exhale – Bend the elbows slightly and squeeze the ring between the hands.
» Inhale – Release the ring.
» Repeat 4 to 6 times in each arm position.

**Modifications**
Seated chest press: Perform the exercises from a seated position if standing is uncomfortable.

**Variations**
Straight arms: Keep the arms straight as you squeeze the ring.
Overhead press: Raise the arms overhead and squeeze the ring.
Diagonal arms: Raise the arms so the ring is in line with the forehead and squeeze the ring.
Low arms: Lower the arms toward the legs as you squeeze the ring.
Steering Wheel: Keep the ring at chest height and rotate the ring in both directions.
Moving chest press: Move the arms from the thighs to overhead as you squeeze the ring at several points along the arc.

**Cueing and Imagery**
» Slide the shoulder blades down the back and keep them there as you squeeze the ring.
» Maintain the tension on the ring as you raise and lower the ring.
» Maintain good standing alignment throughout the exercise.

**Purpose**
» Strengthen the anterior chest.
» Improve scapular stability.
» Teach standing posture.

**Precautions**
Neck, shoulder, arm and wrist injuries – Use gentle pressure on the ring or avoid if the exercise is not comfortable.