

ADAPTING YOGA AND PILATES TO THE POOL



YOGA AND PILATES TRANSITION EASILY FROM LAND TO WATER. The common principles of these disciplines include breathing, focus, and core body strength and regular participants often find that their range of motion expands and their overall movement control increases due to the gentle easing of the body into increasingly more challenging exercises and body positions over a period of time. Performing the exercises in the water will accelerate these changes, and also allows participants with physical limitations or injuries to be successful at performing the exercises. The water allows for emphasis on good body alignment and posture, while providing support to the body.

The water environment

Water provides an excellent medium for practicing yoga and Pilates as it provides sensation and perception not offered on land. Warm water (31 degrees Celsius) provides relaxation to tight and tired muscles, enhancing relaxation and increasing mind body awareness. Buoyancy provides the upward thrust and supports the body. Hydrostatic pressure exerts force on the submerged body, increasing circulation and emphasising diaphragmatic breathing when the lungs are submerged. Water resistance provides a multi-dimensional environment to enhance strength, range of motion, balance

and coordination. Leverage is the length of the limbs moving through the water and affects the centre of balance of the body – the longer the lever the more work and greater the core challenge. These factors, combined with mind body exercises and good breathing, help to create a potentially pain free experience.

When sculling is used to perform water movements, encourage participants to visualise themselves on a beach using their hands to smooth the soft, white sand. The hands function as the tabletop and provide support and balance throughout the exercises, especially when the body is in various positions other than standing.

Yoga

In a land-based yoga workout, postures (or asanas) are performed with control and held for a duration of time or for several deep breaths. As a participant becomes stronger, the duration for which an asana is held increases. In the water, the same principles can be applied. For some of the postures, where the hands would normally touch the floor, adaptations are made as no participant should be expected to put his or her face into the water. Standing postures

LEG PULL-UP (PILATES)

Strengthens: Gluteals, arms, shoulders

Stretches: Hip flexors

OPTION 1

- Start with Forward Kick or Scissors. Engage core throughout exercise.
Cue: Imagine that you have a zipper running from between your feet to your chin, now 'zip-up'.
- Stand on one leg, firmly rooted to the pool floor. Lift the other leg as you inhale, scull for balance. Power down as you exhale.
Cue: Squeeze the glutes as you power down to the bottom of the pool, returning to the core position. Imagine that you are 'wringing' the air out of your lungs. Feel the ribs 'knit together' as you exhale. Repeat 10 to 15 times, then repeat on other leg.

OPTION 2

- Start in Scissors in vertical, one foot forward, other backwards, arms scull for balance. Power legs towards each other (returning to the core position), switching leg position. Repeat 10-15 times, then on other leg.
- **Progress:** Move to incline position, legs will alternate. Put noodle behind back, scull for balance.



Cue: Imagine you are lying on a plank of wood on an incline. Draw the chin inwards, and lengthen the neck. Feel as though you are being stretched from the top of the head and as though the legs are being pulled out of their sockets from the feet.

ADVANCED OPTION

- Put noodle in hands, press towards pool floor and hold.
Cue: Squeeze the shoulder blades together and down towards the hips. Feel as though you are putting your shoulder blades into the back pocket of your pants. Perform 10-15 repetitions.
- Add the upper body, specifically triceps: Bend elbows, allowing the noodle to move upwards, maintaining core, push noodle back to pool floor, straightening elbows.

can be replicated in the water, while the lying postures will require a noodle or flotation belt to allow proper execution.

Pilates

For typical land-based, mat Pilates workouts, exercises are performed no more than 5 to 10 times with total concentration and muscular engagement so that the focus is on quality versus quantity. Exercises are performed lying on the floor, either in supine, side or prone body positions. The body is supported by the floor. When using other Pilates equipment, the body is not necessarily supported or is supported by the equipment (equipment-based classes are usually for more advanced participants).

In the water, up to 15 repetitions of the exercise can be performed with total concentration and muscular engagement. This gives the participants the opportunity to master the movement and focus on the exercise objective. The body is supported by the water and either a noodle or flotation belt. Use of the noodle allows participants to experience some of the movements that would be performed on equipment in a land-based Pilates session. By using the properties of water, a typical workout is transformed into a controlled, purposeful workout with various levels of intensity and challenge.

The core

The core of the body is from the pelvis to the sternum, and provides strength and support to the body and the working muscles. The key muscle engagements for the core are:

1. Pelvic floor muscles are pulled up (try to avoid anal engagement).
2. Abdominals pulled in towards spine and lifted towards chin.
3. Ribs lifted and separated.
4. Shoulders are back and down.
5. Neck is long and lifted.

Overall, feel as though you've 'zipped up' a zipper from your pubis bone to your sternum, pulling every muscle in to the centreline of the body, but without excess tension, so that the body remains square and supported by the core muscles at all times. We consider the area between the shoulders and pelvis the 'Pilates box'.

Progression of land-based movements for water-based workouts

1. Standing with feet on the bottom.
2. Add a noodle under the arm(s)
3. Change the body position (incline, prone, etc.)
4. Move the noodle to the hand, and press it firmly down into the water towards the bottom of the pool.
5. Additional progressions may apply.

LEG PULL-DOWN (PILATES)

Strengthens: Hip flexors, shoulders, arms

OPTION 1

- Start with Forward Kick or Scissors. Engage core throughout exercise.
Cue: Imagine that you have a zipper running from between your feet to your chin, now 'zip-up'. Lengthen through the top of the head.
- Stand on one leg, firmly rooted on the pool floor. Lift the other leg behind slightly as you inhale, scull for balance. Power down and forward as you exhale.
Cue: Imagine you are kicking a soccer ball or football as you power down to the bottom of the pool, returning to the core position. Imagine that you are 'wringing' the air out of your lungs. Feel the ribs 'knit together' as you exhale.

Repeat 10 to 15 times, then repeat on other leg.

OPTION 2

- Start in Scissors in vertical, one foot forward, other backwards, arms opposite to hands. Power legs towards each other, switching leg position.
- Progress: Move to incline position, legs will alternate. Put noodle against chest, scull for balance, with core engaged.

Cue: Imagine you are lying face forward on a plank of wood on an incline. Draw the chin inwards, and lengthen the neck. Press the shoulder blades together

and down your back towards your glutes. Feel as though you are being stretched from the top of the head and as though the legs are being pulled out of their sockets from the feet.

Perform 10 to 15 repetitions.



ADVANCED OPTION

- Put noodle in hands, press towards pool floor and hold.
Cue: As for option 2.
- Add the upper body, specifically chest: Bend elbows, allowing the noodle to move upwards, maintaining Pillar, push noodle back to pool bottom, straightening elbows. To work triceps in this position, keep the elbows into the sides of the body throughout the exercise.

So, how are these exercises different from the land-based versions? On land the hands (or elbows) and one foot are in contact with the floor at all times. In the water the core muscles are engaged more because the hands are holding an unstable object (noodle) and the feet are alternating and not in continuous contact with the floor. Range of motion is increased for more difficulty, and stabilisation of the scapula (shoulder blades) is required. Shoulders should be down and the neck lengthened.

These exercises utilise buoyancy, resistance and leverage. For additional challenge, change to straddling the noodle.



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The incline will be smaller, adding challenge through reduced stability. Maintain the core position and scull for balance. ■

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