

Pilaqua encore

WATER TRAINING AND PILATES have one very important thing in common: they both challenge your core stability and strength. From the moment you step into the water, whether you are in shallow or deep water, your body has to continuously stabilise itself in order to correctly execute movement. The core stabilisers work very similarly to the way in which they operate during most Pilates exercises, on both the mat or the reformer.

I have been teaching Pilates for five years and the more I discovered its benefits during this time, the more I found myself comparing it to water training, so I decided it was time for the two to meet!

The following exercises focus on the same outcome as their mat counterpart, but are adapted to suit the water environment. In Pilates, we use gravity as resistance against our limbs to create challenge. In the water, you can substitute gravity with equipment. Another consideration when adapting Pilates for the aqua environment was to think of moves that would keep students moving to avoid them feeling cold and that would combine stability training and cardio training.

When you teach this sort of exercise, the emphasis is on correct alignment, core control, breathing and stabilisation, so you might need to spend more time reminding your students to, among other things, keep neutral pelvis or to align the head with the rest of the spine.

Another great benefit of doing these exercises in the water is that you realise instantly if you are using one side of the body more than the other, because you start travelling in unwanted directions! This feedback mechanism is another mutual benefit (symmetry) that water training and Pilates have in common.

Here are some Pilaqua moves that will have your students shaking to their core!

Criss Cross with dumbbells

Start in a standing position, feet wider than hips, hold the dumbbells with body facing right. Sweep the arms to the left, keeping hips pointing ahead and dumbbells under the surface. Lift the left leg at the end of the movement to increase challenge on stability.

Why: Strengthen obliques, glutes, pectorals and anterior myofascial sling.

Emphasis: Keep abdominals drawn in, keep spine and waist long, keep hips levelled, start the movement from the



waist and not the arms, turn the head with the spine.

Watch out for: Loss of balance, standing foot not fully gripping the pool bottom (for the end option of lifting one leg off the floor), shoulder shrugging, arms moving without torso rotation.

Side lying kicks with dumbbells



Start in a side lying position (suspended), hold both dumbbells with one hand, align the arm under the shoulder, keep body horizontal, do scissor kicks with legs straight (soft knees).

Why: Strengthens shoulder girdle, waist, quads, glutes and hamstrings.



Emphasis: Keep spine and waist long, keep the arm under the shoulder, keep torso and hips aligned without flaring of the ribcage, minimise rocking of the body.

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Watch out for: Arm on dumbbells going toward water surface. Poor neck/shoulder alignment. Excessive rocking.

Options: Make small circles with the hand holding the dumbbells whilst avoiding rocking to increase challenge on balance and stability.



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Quadruped with dumbbells

Start in a prone position (suspended), hold dumbbells under the chest, do cycling-like movements with the legs, keeping the arms under the chest.

Why: Strengthen core, shoulder protractors, glutes and hamstrings, improves co-ordination and balance.

Emphasis: Maintain long and straight spine, shoulders away from the ears, abs drawn to spine, travel in a straight line.

Watch out for: Shoulder shrugging, lumbar hyperextension, travelling sideways.

Options: Change the leg movement to flutter kicks and raise one arm to the surface, keeping the other one in line with chest - this will challenge balance and stability. ■



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Currently based in Hong Kong, but originally from Italy, Mirko is a group fitness instructor, teacher trainer, aqua fitness lecturer and international presenter who has worked in the fitness industry for the past 10 years.

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