

♥ Pilates ♥ Pilates ♥ Pilates ♥

Pilates A, B, C

A – Alignment

Correct posture – standing

- Stand with feet hip width apart (Charlie Chaplin feet – stand with feet together, keep big toes touching and move heels out, keep heels still and move toes out inline with heel, feet and knees facing forward).
- Feel feet spread on floor, raise toes gently and feel weight evenly distributed across three points on each foot, behind big toe, little toe and heel. Lower toes and feel weight evenly distributed across both feet.
- Draw up through your insteps and inner thighs whilst keeping knees soft and not clenching or tensing your lower back or glutes (big bottom muscles).
- Long even gap between hips and ribs. Avoid flaring the ribs, keep them gently drawn down. Imagine a spirit level across hip bones.
- Roll shoulders and feel the shoulder blades slide down back towards waistband of trousers and slightly drawn towards each other.
- Chest open (not pulled back army style though) open across the collar bones, tops of shoulders away from ears, lengthen back of neck with a slight tuck of the chin.
- Lengthen up through legs, back, back of neck and crown of head to ceiling, standing tall but not straining to keep it so.

Neutral Spine

Neutral spine is the natural curvature of your spine.

- Standing in correct posture as above.
- Gently tilt the pelvis forward and back making the movement between the two extremes smaller and smaller until you feel you are in the centre of the two extremes.
- Double check by placing heel of hands on hip bones, thumbs towards navel, fingers towards pubic bone. Fingers and thumbs should be pretty much in line. If thumbs are higher than fingers the back is too arched and if fingers are higher than thumbs the bottom is tipped too far under. Your hands should form a flat triangle. Also, try to check by standing sideways on to a mirror and look at the position of your pelvis.

B - Breathing

In Pilates we breathe 'wide & full' into the lower ribcage, lateral thoracic breathing.

Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth as if blowing out gently through a straw.

- Standing in correct posture as above.
- Place hands on lower ribcage with fingertips gently touching.
- Breathe in wide and full through nose (keeping shoulders down and knees soft) fingertips separate slightly, breathe out through mouth (straw), fingertips slightly touching again.

C – Centring – Activating core muscles

Our core stability muscles, Transversus Abdominis, Internal Obliques and Multifidus muscles wrap around our centre rather like a corset and by activating these deep postural muscles we are building a strong centre from which to work from.

- Standing in correct posture as above.
- Place fingertips on hip bones, walk fingers in towards an inch toward and below navel, gently press fingers in and cough. The muscles you feel pushing against the fingers when you cough are the Transversus Abdominis muscles.

- Imagine you have a wideish hipster belt on which has 10 notches, 10 being the tightest.
- Breathe normally; draw deep abdominals in towards spine, imagining you are tightening the belt to notch 10. This is of course way too tight. Relax.
- Try this time draw deep abdominals to spine but this time only tightening the belt to notch 3. Just creating a little tension.
- So when we say 'activate/engage the core' – draw deep abdominals to spine and tighten that belt to notch 3.
- Sometimes called the 'B-line', imagine a line between your hip bones, drawing that area in towards your spine & drawing your waist in, like a drawstring on a pair of trousers.
- Pelvic Floor muscles are also part of your core, please see separate sheet.
- Once able to activate core muscles (Transversus Abdominis and Pelvic Floor) practise this sequence:
- Draw pelvic floor muscles up (squeeze if unable to draw up yet) and deep abdominal in, breathe in and lengthen spine breathe out maintain your core engagement & draw tops of shoulder down away from ears & shoulder blades down back – you are now ready to exercise (please ask the teacher if you are unsure of any of these points as they are the fundamentals of Pilates).
- Trying to maintain your core as you perform an exercise, you may find initially that this is difficult to maintain, in which case you can re-engage, reactivate (contract) your core as soon as you feel you have lost it, either stop, reset and start again or, you can reactivate your core muscles you go along. In time this does become easier.

Correct posture and neutral spine in other positions:

Sitting

- Sit tall; pull your sit muscles away so you are sitting on the sitting bones not on your spine, you may find a cushion or towel tucked under your sit bones makes it easier to sit tall, especially if you are tight in the lower back and/or hamstring. Feel weight equal across each buttock.
- Feet and knees at hip distance apart.
- Lengthen through back, back of neck, and crown of head to ceiling.

Prone (laying face down)

- Lay face down, feel equally distributed across each hip bone.
- Forehead on hands or folded towel/cushion/block, arms in diamond shape or hands by your sides.
- Toes at hip width apart.
- Breathe in lengthen through back, back of neck; draw navel to spine, breathe out and slide shoulder blades down back. You may feel abdominals slightly lift off floor.

Supine (laying on back)

Also known as the Relaxation Position.

- Lay on back, knees bent, soles of feet flat on floor, weight evenly distributed across back of both hips and both shoulder blades. Keep ribs down, chin tucked and chest open.
- Neck & spine lengthened and in alignment.
- Gently tilt pelvis to lower back touches floor and gently tilt opposite way so back slightly arches, make movement between the two extremes smaller and smaller until you feel you are in the centre of the two extremes.
- Double check by placing heel of hands on hip bones, thumbs towards navel, fingers towards pubic bone. Fingers and thumbs should be pretty much in line. If thumbs are higher than fingers the back is too arched and if fingers are higher than thumbs the bottom is tipped too far under. Your hands should form a flat triangle. Imagine a spirit level across the hip bones.

Check as often as you can that you are equal on both sides - weight equal on both feet; hips & knees same height; not tilting head to one-side; not lifting a shoulder.