



## Clinical Pilates for rehab and more

**Jennifer M. MacLeod**  
Special to the CJN

**B**y now, you've probably heard of Pilates. Perhaps you associate it with mats, balls and weights, but that's not the whole picture, says certified instructor Barbie Dukes.

Pilates is more than a way to exercise, she says. "In the hands of a qualified practitioner, it's an excellent form of rehab after injury or surgery."

"Pilates actually began as a form of rehabilitation," Dukes says. It was developed in Germany in the early 20th century by Joseph Pilates, a trained gymnast who worked with injured patients in hospital beds during World War I. "He began to understand to get these people strong and well, they needed to strengthen their

bodies." Yet most were bedridden. How could they accomplish that? His solution: equipment that could work "in the horizontal plane," while patients were lying down.

Dukes, who trained at the National Ballet School, Royal Winnipeg Ballet and with teachers from Juilliard and the New York City Ballet before studying with the internationally recognized Stott Pilates organization, brings her interest and experience in dance and movement to her current practice. "I have been teaching movement education and neuromuscular re-patterning for 20 years," she says.

From her work with professional dancers, she's moved toward applying what she calls "clinical Pilates" principles to a general population suffering from chronic injuries, postural dysfunctions like scoliosis,

joint health issues, osteoporosis and arthritis, sciatica and balance issues following hip replacement. Along the way, she took specialized Pilates qualifications in post-rehabilitation and athletic conditioning.

These days, her business, The Center of Movement (905-764-5791), gets referrals not only by word-of-mouth – though a "satisfied customer is always a great resource" – but also from professionals: physiotherapists, registered massage therapists, chiropractors and physicians. "There's a whole professional network," recognizing the value of clinical Pilates. "Orthopedic surgeons are really recognizing that the principles... are the same used in rehabilitation of orthopedic conditions."

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# More to a strong core than you think

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In her home studio, equipped with professional-grade commercial Pilates equipment, Dukes first meets with clients and assesses their needs. "I will do a series of postural and gait analyses... mobilization tests and assessments." She and the client "decide from there what their goals are, and set up a detailed program which is suited specifically to their needs."

As Pilates himself discovered almost a century ago, people heal faster when they are moving and strengthening themselves, and Dukes says the equipment is key, especially the reformer, which looks a cross between a large coffee table and a rowing machine. "It really supports the body as it heals, still allows you to build important and critical core stabilization and neutral alignment which helps to balance out the muscles around the joints to decrease pain."

By attaching and detaching specific pieces to the reformer, Dukes can support injured areas while strengthening others. And because the workout is extremely low impact, it can be highly efficient and precise. "Those who have better core strength have better dynamic control of their movement and are less likely to sustain injuries."

For seniors, she calls Pilates "essential training for fall prevention." Some results have shown that it can actually help increase bone density, effectively reversing osteoporosis. Some of her clients have said that technicians at the lab where they have had their bone-density scans told them they should be doing Pilates. "These professionals know... clinical Pilates will actually increase their bone density, and that it is reversible," Dukes says.

Another surprise is its potential to help in breathing dysfunctions by increasing lung capacity and improving postural positioning. Pilates emphasizes breath control and breath flow, "the most efficient way to breathe while you're maintaining your core stabilization," and Dukes has actually helped clients increase lung capacity.

"I've had clients [with] asthma, they cough a lot.



Barbie Dukes guides a client through specialized rehab exercises with the reformer.

Their posture is just horrible, lots of tension in their upper body. I'm able to bring their spine and posture back to neutral. It takes away their pain and postural dysfunction while increasing their lung capacity."

But you won't get most of these benefits just perching on an exercise ball. Dukes says she's "not talking about Pilates classes in the gym." What she does is personalized, with specialized equipment. "I'm applying the rehabilitation and therapeutic principles inherent in Stott Pilates to restoring optimal function and dynamic control through a clinical Pilates rehab

program."

While you might think the goal of rehab is to get back where you were before the injury or operation, Dukes aims higher. Clinical Pilates can actually "help people recover stronger than they were before the incident... and it significantly reduces re-injuries as well... While working the whole body to keep it in shape, we progressively rebuild strength and mobility in the injured areas."

For more information about clinical Pilates, visit [www.thecenterofmovement.com](http://www.thecenterofmovement.com).



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