

# 02 MIND, BODY & SOUL

## Why core belief lies at the heart of a healthy life

Strengthening the body's epicentre is about more than toning the abdominal muscles, writes Erin Munro.

Anyone who's ever stepped into a gym or joined a boot camp has likely heard the phrase "strengthen your core" uttered by a personal trainer on at least one occasion. But what is a strong core, and why is it such a desirable thing to have?

It turns out that a strong core is crucial to a healthy body, and its value goes beyond achieving toned abs. Another way to describe the core would be as the body's epicentre, home to inner organs and the central nervous system. It includes the abdominal muscles, and the muscles around the spine, hips and pelvis.

Sarah Todd is the owner and director of Unite Health Management, the official provider of clinical pilates courses for physiotherapists throughout Australia.

"Having a strong core can help to prevent injuries: it protects the spine, reduces the prevalence of lower back pain, and improves posture and breathing," she explains.

Pilates, named for its founder Joseph Pilates, is a mind-body exercise program that specifically targets the body's deep postural muscles through a progressive repertoire of both mat and equipment-based exercises, making it a prime example of a core-strengthening workout.

The mind-body connection is made via a strong emphasis on breathing and centering, which Todd says is key to engaging the body's core.

"You're thinking about the movement, you're engaging your abdominal muscles, and then you're starting to move," Todd says.



For beginners interested in trying pilates, Todd recommends a one-on-one session with a qualified instructor so that the key principles behind the exercise can be explained and an initial assessment performed.

From there, "we would recommend starting with

Barre workouts feature intense interval exercises choreographed to music.

mat-based sessions or group classes, and then progressing to the large equipment," says Todd.

Reformer pilates classes, which involve using a reformer machine that adds more resistance to exercises via springs and weights, are an increasingly popular way to practise pilates, and DVDs are available for those who like working out at home. Todd recommends practising pilates two to three times a week to see results.

Another workout that draws on pilates principles is Barre Attack, a ballet-dance-pilates fusion that started gaining popularity in Australia about five years ago, named for the barre handrails used in ballet training. Donna Adams is the founder of The Barre Studio in central Sydney, and describes Barre Attack as "turbo pilates".

"[It] incorporates pilates moves designed to strengthen and tone your core with the support of the ballet barre, the resistance of stretchy pilates bands and the stability of exercise balls," she says.

Barre workouts feature intense interval exercises choreographed to music, which Adams calls a "one-stop shop" due to the emphasis on cardio as well as muscle strengthening.

Like various forms of pilates, Adams says that those who regularly practise Barre Attack will achieve a strengthened core and back muscles, improved posture and balance, increased flexibility and mobility, as well as overall enhanced muscle tone.

Boutique studios are the primary purveyors of barre-based workouts at the moment, with classes that Adams describes as "highly energetic and easily adapted to any fitness level".

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