

## ***“Above all, breathe correctly”: Pilates Breathing***

One of the principals of the Pilates Method of Body Conditioning is breathing. To quote Joseph Pilates, “above all, breathe correctly.” Unfortunately, in too many Pilates mat classes, this principal is being simplified by instructors who cue their students to only “breathe”. Videos show conflicting breathing techniques and the original Method created is being watered down. Students need to be taught thoracic breathing in order to maximize the benefits that Pilates offers.

Thoracic breathing is also known as ribcage breathing or lateral breathing, and this is because the ribcage should expand completely upon completion of a full inhale. Cue the student(s) to lie on their back and have them place four fingers of each hand on the sides of their ribcage. The fingers should be spread and have them practice breathing into the fingers. Correct breathing will result in feeling the ribcage expand laterally. A deeper breath may be taken by also breathing into the back of the ribcage. Once this is taught, one hand remains on the ribcage and the other is placed on the belly below the navel. Upon an inhalation, the belly should not distend and the hand below the navel will not rise. Upon exhalation, cue them to envision pulling the lower abdominal area in and away from the hand. Inhale....no rise, exhale...pull in further.

Some people find that this type of breathing is difficult or makes them dizzy. Let them know that’s OK and that mastering the principal of breathing is not easy. If it makes them dizzy, they do not have to inhale so fully. To fully master this principal, encourage them to put it to the ball test. Place a small ball (such as a tennis ball, base ball, or soft ball) onto their lower abdominal area. They should be able to practice breathing without the ball rolling off of their stomach. If they are on their way to mastering breathing, they should be able to perform the Hundred with the ball below their navel without it rolling off, across the floor and out the door!

To sum up Joseph Pilates’ quote of “above all, breathe correctly”, Pilates professionals must teach Pilates style breathing:

- Inhale to prepare for a move and exhale to execute it.
- All exhalations are forceful and complete.
- Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth
- Breathing is thoracic.

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