

## **What is the difference between Pilates and Yoga?**

There is no definitive answer to this question! There are a number of ways in which I could answer it, so here's just one way, based on my personal experience of teaching both of these mind-body disciplines:

When talking about yoga, many of us in the West are referring to the physical aspect (asana/s) of an ancient system developed by spiritual seekers in India to realise their highest human potential. The Sanskrit word "yoga" means "to yoke" or "to join". To some, the practice of yoga means connecting body and mind to bring about wellbeing, and for others it is a spiritual path towards union of the individual human life force (prana) with the Universal.

Joseph Pilates (1883-1967) experienced the health benefits of connecting body and mind through yoga, bodybuilding and gymnastics. He developed his own integrated comprehensive system of exercise, emphasising use of the mind and breath to activate the deep muscles of the body that stabilise the skeleton.

Yoga positions require the support of these muscles, so if they are engaged in practising asana their endurance will naturally increase. However, if they are inhibited and fail to be recruited, they will remain inhibited. My personal concern as a teacher is that executing yoga poses with poor stabilisation could lead to injury. Of course injuries can also occur through unskilful performance of Pilates, but there is generally more chance of recruiting the deep stabilising muscles whilst practising Pilates since the exercises are specifically designed to "fire them up". My point is that if an individual needs to address trunk stability I would recommend Pilates.

So does Pilates address stability whilst yoga addresses flexibility? A balanced Pilates programme should work for functional range of movement to support everyday activities. Yoga increases flexibility, tending to go beyond the r.o.m. required by most, although it could offer functional stretches to those who need greater than normal flexibility, such as sportspeople. The wonderful thing about the deeper bends and twists of yoga, as well as the inverted poses, is that they have more of a massaging effect on the internal organs and the lymphatic system, which is why you can finish an asana session feeling warm and cleansed from the inside out. Some postures are energising whereas others are soothing, therefore asana can be used therapeutically to restore emotional balance.

What I find wonderful about Modern Pilates is the use of "segmental control", which means moving the spine bit by bit. Not only does this strengthen the small deep muscles between each segment of the spine, but it also ensures even mobilisation throughout the spine. Without some awareness of segmental control, there's a danger of always "hinging" at the most mobile point whilst the joints either side stay stiff, eventually resulting in pain and injury.

Personally, I have a tendency towards hypermobility, so I need Pilates to work on stability to protect me against injury when doing yoga asanas. Professionally, it is my experience that people generally need to address trunk stability, mobility and flexibility in a balanced, functional way to allow good posture and efficient movement in daily life.

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