

An Aging Nation and Pilates

The nation's populace is growing older and older. This aging demographic needs to stay active, flexible and strong to live a long, full life. Master Instructor Scott Samford explains how he teaches this client base that sorely needs the benefits of Pilates.

The landscape of the United States is changing. For the first time in U.S. history, older adults (those over the age of 65) are projected to outnumber children (those under 18) by the year 2035. That is only 16 years away. In the meantime, the largest portion of the American population is getting older and they face new and bigger health challenges every day. Are you ready and able to help this growing client base?

We all know that the Pilates method works for everybody. For aging adults, benefits like increased strength, flexibility, stamina and muscle mass are important, but it is the secondary benefits of Pilates like improved balance, coordination and a better mind body connection that increases the quality of life for older individuals.

While working with clients over the age of 65 may seem daunting. You may ask yourself: how do you apply The Work to an elderly body that isn't very healthy? How do you keep the integrity of The Work with a body with severely limited movement? A simple understanding of The Work and biomechanics

means you can easily modify the system to benefit anyone. These are the ideas and concepts that we, as Pilates instructors, need to be prepared for.

As with any clients, our job – first and foremost – is to do no harm. Working with seniors and the elderly requires a wider set of skills, a deeper understanding of The Work, and the will, desire and patience to help.

Before working with this special population, some important considerations and issues to understand are:

- Spinal and joint issues
- Thinning skin and bruising
- Orthostatic / postural hypotension
- Medical emergency preparedness

When working with seniors, it is important to plan and prioritize your time with them. Choose exercises that meet the goals of your client while at the same time meet their healthy needs. That means no client will tell you that they are having trouble getting off the toilet, but is a pervasive issue with elderly individuals. So include functional exercises that will directly strengthen the muscles they need to perform the action.

Communication is key when working with elderly. During a session, it is important to explain why you are doing what you are doing. Listen to them and be aware of their frustrations. Find out what their frustrations are; it may be something physical or it may be psychological. Both of these limiters are real and should be talked about with your client.

When appropriate, include balance exercises. For the elderly, falls are not only serious, but potentially deadly. The time spent with your client should be designed to help them live a safer and healthier life when they are not with you.

More and more, elderly clients are coming to Pilates studios across the nation in order to find the help and relief that

typical medicine or activities can't provide. We are not healers, and very few of us are doctors, but we have the tools that can provide relief when it can't be found anywhere else. Most importantly, we can provide the skills that will enrich the quality of life for a person who truly needs us.

The elderly are an amazing group of clients to work with. They have enriched my life as much as I have helped theirs. If you are looking for the tools and skills to better help this amazing group of people, please join me in 2020 at the Pilates Empowerment Summit in Miami where I will be hosting workshops in order to give you the skills to help change a life.

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Scott Samford is a Peak Pilates Level III Master Instructor and Mentor. He co-owns the Pilates Connection in Houston, Texas where he works daily with this population. You can email Scott at scott@pilates-connection.com.