

Exercise Spotlight: Swan I Neck Roll

Pilates has so many wonderful exercises that open the chest and shoulders. One of the first extension exercises students learn is Swan I. Zoey Trap takes you through the full execution of this introductory exercise.

Swan I Neck Roll not only stretches the anterior torso, but also strengthens the upper back postural muscles and promotes cervical mobility. This beginner exercise helps lay the foundation for Swan Dive which will come much later. It is normally performed for three repetitions with the last rep getting the addition of the “neck roll.”

Setup



Set up in prone position (face down), with the elbows bent and drawn in close to the body and the hands under the shoulders. Work with your legs no wider than hip distance apart and in parallel position with both the big and little toes on the mat.

Initiation



To begin the Swan, inhale and curl up, articulating the spine into thoracic extension. And exhale, lengthening back down. After two repetitions, look to one side (being mindful to keep your head level), roll the head down toward the chest, to the opposite shoulder, back to center and then reverse.

Execution



Like all Pilates exercises, how we execute Swan I is key:

- Keep the abs strongly drawn up away from the mat.
- Actively open the shoulders and move the chest forward. Work to feel the stretch across the chest and shoulders and extend the thoracic versus the lumbar spine.
- Hold the pubic bones to the mat.
- Keep the elbows folded in like the wings on a bird.
- Work to open the collar bones and avoid bunching the shoulders up around the neck.
- Reach your legs long away from your center and hold them still as you move up and down.
- Don't execute a half push up! Keep the work in the powerhouse versus the arms!
- If you are tight and your shoulders are elevating, omit the neck roll until you are more open.

Breathe deep, and open up to the possibilities of Swan I Neck Roll. As you gain in strength and flexibility, you will be ready for Swan Dive Prep and Swan Dive. And the fun is only beginning as Swan is an exercise that is taught on just about every piece of apparatus!