

# A Pilates Life: From Back Surgery to Best-Selling Author

As a studio owner, a [Peak Pilates Master Instructor](#) and a best-selling author, Karen Ingram has [leveraged the power of Pilates](#) to improve professional portfolio and career accolades in so many different ways. Her list of achievements goes well beyond the professional world though, as she initially found the practice out of necessity. That necessity was the need to alleviate the pain and discomfort that was stemming from a severe lower-back injury she had sustained.

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***Editor's Note: This story was extracted from a [wide-ranging interview covering Karen's success](#). However, given the emotional gravity, it only felt right to give this portion of Karen's story its own moment in the spotlight.***

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[su\_quote]When I was 21 and a student I had pretty major surgery on my spine for two prolapsed discs. In the 18 months leading up to my surgery I'd been in agony, and once I'd recovered from the operation, it seemed like a miracle cure. I was pain-free and went straight back to racing dinghy's, skiing, cycling – all the things I loved. What I now know is that the surgery had done nothing to address the initial cause of my back problems, really bad muscle imbalance, rubbish postural muscles and glutes that did not fire.

So, about five years later my back problems came back tenfold. I lost power and feeling in my left foot, had no reflex in my right ankle; it felt like a spear had been thrust through my left calf. I couldn't work, in fact, I couldn't do anything. I was advised to have a second operation, but this time there was a risk of permanent damage and even paralysis. I was terrified. I decided to try everything and anything first. I tried massage, physio, chiropractic, osteo, I gave up cheese, had reiki... anything! Then I read an article about Pilates. My journey began.

After a couple of false starts, I found an excellent Pilates class, and my road to recovery began. At the time, there was hardly any Pilates in Wales, and I really wanted to learn more, so I enrolled on a course in London to train as a Pilates instructor. As my body changed my pain grew less, and one day my consultant said he no longer needed to see me. I was taken off the waiting list for surgery.

Even though I was getting stronger, my day job was killing me. I worked in government policy and spent all day either at my desk writing strategies or in meetings. I realized I would never be 100% well unless I changed my job. I'd just come home from a week off work doing nothing but exploring movement on this amazing course. I was pain-free and feeling alive. After one day, back at my desk, I was back to being stiff and in pain. So, I quit!

My partner and I went on to open [Barefoot Studio](#), the first Pilates studio and wellness center in Wales. I taught Pilates and Nordic walking full time, we had a shop that sold many of the things that had helped me like swopper seating, healthy back bags, MBT footwear, and we had a great team of therapists. Pilates gave me a pain-free life and one of the best jobs in the world. I get to work with people who've been dealt a similar hand to me and to teach them how to use Pilates to get their life back too[/su\_quote]

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[su\_animate type="flipInY" duration="4" delay="0.5"]*[Read About Karen's successful Pilates and physical wellness business and check out her new best-selling book using the link below!](#)*[/su\_animate]

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*This article was contributed by James Gardikas |  
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