

Movement of the Month: The Roll Up

By: Zoey Trap

The Roll Up is the first exercise in the mat order that requires a student to articulate the spine. Joseph Pilates said, "These 'rolling' and 'unrolling' movements tend to gradually but surely restore the spine to its normal at-birth position with its correspondingly increased flexibility." So being able to do a full Roll Up is a big cause for celebration.

Goal

The goal of the Roll Up is to promote articulation of the spine, increase flexibility of the posterior chain, and to correct pelvic rhythm while building abdominal strength. While it can be challenging for you if you have a tight back and hamstrings, it also provides the dose of the medicine needed to help open the back body up. Ideally, it is performed for five repetitions.

Execution

Like any exercise, starting right is the key to reaching the ideal Roll Up. Begin with the basic building block, the seated roll back. Sit at the front of the mat with knees bent. With the hands holding the back of thighs, curl your tail under to roll the pelvis and move back to the sacrum. Then stay round and use your abdominals to return. Think of the seat pulling under and the abs deepening. If you're having trouble with "rolling the pelvis like a wheel," put a sponge ball behind the small of your back and pull your tail under you and roll your pelvis back into the ball—remember you aren't leaning back, you are moving back starting at the tailbone and using

your abs, not gravity to take you back.

Once you can do this building block properly, move on to the next step. Lie on your back with your arms toward the ceiling, shoulder distance apart. (If you have access to a mat with a strap and a weighted pole this will make getting started with your roll up easier.) Reach your legs long and together, and press them into your centerline, imagining they are bound to the ground. Curl your head up, look through the frame your arms have created and peel your spine off the mat one bone at a time (bend your knees if you need to). At the top of the movement, straighten your legs and shape the front of your body up and over to create a capital 'C'. Draw your abs strongly back as you reach through the crown of your head, your fingers and your heels. Then stretch your whole body.

To return to the mat, pull your tail strongly under, keep your thighs pressing together and roll back pulling strongly with your abs to lengthen one vertebra at a time to the mat. Reach your sitz bones strongly to your heels to create length outward from your center. Get longer as you roll down. If you have trouble going bone by bone, think low back, middle back, upper back.

Ah, that feels so good. Now do it four more times!