#MovementOfTheMonth: Swan I Neck Roll

Yoga isn't the only practice that gives the body a chance to open the heart; Pilates has wonderful exercises that open the chest and shoulders as well!

One of the first extension exercises students learn is Swan I. This exercise not only stretches the anterior torso, but also strengthens the upper back postural muscles and promotes cervical mobility.

This beginner exercise is normally performed for three repetitions with the last rep getting the addition of the "neck roll."

Set up in prone position (face down), with the elbows bent and drawn in close to the body with 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.

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

Like all Pilates movements, how we do the Swan 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 just beginning, as Swan is an exercise that is taught on just about every piece of apparatus!