

Pilates and the Spine

By Suzanne Meledeo

As [Pilates instructors](#), we encounter clients on a regular basis with common postural deviations. Most of these clients experience pain daily due to the misalignments of the spine and pelvis. We have the opportunity to work with clients using the principles and exercises created by Joseph Pilates to help realign the spine through healthy movement, while strengthening and stabilizing the body by connecting to the Powerhouse (all the muscles in, around and through center of the body and supported by the inner thighs and glutes).

This is why we [became instructors](#). We can make a difference in the lives of our clients and lead them on a path to a pain-free life.

While we focus on the postural deviation of scoliosis, I want to share some stories to encourage you as instructors on how the method works:

I have several clients who suffered chronic pain as a result of scoliosis, but they have found relief with continued Pilates practice. They are not alone in their journey. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, about six million people in the U.S. suffer from scoliosis, which is a sideways curve of the spine most often appearing during the growth spurt children have just before puberty (1).

Jen

Jen is a 26-year-old female who has been taking Pilates for a year and a half. She was diagnosed with scoliosis as a child and shared that it was difficult growing up with the condition, but she got through it with ongoing treatments and adjustments. There were some days when she felt fine and others when she could not even get out of bed because of the

pain. She was going in for treatments a minimum of two times a week until she found Pilates. She said, "Between the spine alignment exercises and the balance and strengthening, it's incomparable. I don't wake up in pain and I can move more days without back pain than I ever have in my entire life." With Jen, we have focused on her Powerhouse and pelvic alignment in all exercises helping her spine stay aligned on a daily basis. Some key exercises for Jen (and everyone) for building strength in her Powerhouse are Hundred, Roll Up, Roll Over and the Abdominal Series. The [Chair](#) is also a favorite of hers and helps her focus on pelvic alignment with exercises like Pumping One-Leg Standing Front and Standing Side, Front Balance Control, Side Balance Control and Mountain Climb.

Kristie

Kristie was diagnosed with scoliosis during a school screening at the age of 13. She had Cotrel-Dubousset rods placed in her spine when she was 15 and her doctor told her she should stay active and exercise for the rest of her life to decrease potential future complications. He specifically recommended that she strengthen all her back muscles to protect her spine. Since she added Pilates to her exercise regimen six years ago at the age 34, we have focused on doing just what her doctor recommended. By working to strengthen her Powerhouse connection, she has achieved more flexibility in her spine. It is amazing to see the level of articulation she can attain with rods in her spine. We have worked to create an internal brace, so to speak, and promote flexibility, posture and muscle strength for a healthy spine. Since Kristie has had the rods for over twenty years and has always been very active with all forms of exercise, she progressed systematically through all three levels working at her ideal for her body. The most important exercises for her weekly regime are exercises that create length in her spine and stretch the muscles that move the spine. Specifically for her, these exercises include Roll Up on the Mat, Short Spine Massage and

Long Spine Massage on the Reformer, Mermaid on any piece of apparatus, and Roll Back One Arm on the [Cadillac](#).

Carolyn

Carolyn was diagnosed with scoliosis 10 years ago at the age of 52 after spending many years in pain. Seeking different treatments to bring her freedom from her chronic pain, she found Pilates. For the past six years, she has been focusing on flexibility through length and opposition, strengthening her Powerhouse, and improving articulation in her spine. The control she exhibits when articulating her spine with her Powerhouse is beautiful to watch. The Roll Up on the Mat, Short Spine Massage on the [Reformer](#), and the Roll Back on the Cadillac are three exercises we do in every session. Additionally, her pelvic misalignment coupled with her tight hip flexors and hamstrings is addressed and greatly relieved with the Ballet stretches on the Ladder Barrel.

Our work is not meant to replace the work of doctors or physical therapists, but we can make a difference in our clients' lives as evidenced by Jen, Kristie and Carolyn's stories. Each client's journey is unique, and as instructors, we should stay within our purview of knowledge, while seeking to further our expertise through continuing education. The more information and practical experience we have, the better we can serve our clients. I know there are days when it is difficult to stay positive, but remember that we are making a difference. As Joseph Pilates said, "every moment of our life can be the beginning of great things."

Did Pilates help you overcome scoliosis? We want to hear your story! [Subscribe](#) to our newsletter for more inspiring stories about how Pilates works!

References:

1. University of Maryland Medical Center. (2005-2012). In-

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