

Yoga on the Chair

September is Yoga Month!

September is National Yoga Month, and we celebrate this complementary mind-body-spirit modality alongside our beloved Pilates practice. Rather than viewing these disciplines as separate entities, we embrace the philosophy of Pilates AND Yoga—two powerful movement systems that enhance and inform each other.

Common Ground: Where Pilates and Yoga Converge

What do Hatha Yoga and Pilates share? Both disciplines emphasize the fundamental connection between breath and movement, cultivating mental focus and inner stillness. Each provides a profound pathway to restore healthy movement patterns and enhance overall well-being.

Both practices encompass diverse approaches and styles. Pilates includes classical, traditional, contemporary, therapeutic, and fusion methods, while yoga encompasses Ashtanga and its vinyasa offshoots, Iyengar-based practices, and restorative and therapeutic modalities.

Distinguishing Characteristics: How They Differ

While yoga boasts thousands of years of history, Pilates is relatively new and less extensively researched. Yoga primarily utilizes body weight against gravity, sometimes incorporating props or wall work, whereas Pilates offers the unique advantage of specialized apparatus that can both assist and challenge movement patterns.

The breath-to-movement ratio also differs significantly. Classical Pilates follows a “one breath, one movement” principle, while yoga classes incorporate holds ranging from brief 3-5 breath sequences to extended 50-breath poses. Yoga

classes typically include pranayama (breathwork), meditation, and relaxation, while Pilates maintains continuous flow, concluding in an upright position to carry the work functionally into daily life.

Philosophically, Pilates teaches the mind to control the body, while yoga serves as a spiritually grounding practice with the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

A Personal Journey: Bridging Two Worlds

I've been teaching mind-body-spirit movement since the 1980s. My early classes blended contemporary dance, qigong, yoga, Pilates, martial arts, and meditation. In the 1990s, I gravitated toward yoga, becoming certified in vinyasa before discovering Pilates later that decade and opening my first studio in London. The early 2000s brought my introduction to Jivamukti yoga, completing my movement education foundation.

For seven years, I co-owned Inner Space in Avon, Connecticut, with my daughter Kathryn Coyle. Despite our robust clientele practicing both Pilates and yoga, we noticed minimal crossover between the two communities—a missed opportunity we were determined to address. We recognized that yoga practitioners would benefit from Pilates' emphasis on core stability and precise alignment, while Pilates students could gain from yoga's mindfulness and flexibility training.

Creating Community Through Integration

We launched community classes—free or donation-based for local charities—featuring a blended “Pilago” format that appealed to both populations. This initiative successfully built community, introduced students to diverse movement approaches, and created meaningful crossover.

When yoga students sought to improve their handstands or balancing poses, I would demonstrate correlating exercises on the barrel or chair, showing them how apparatus support could

accelerate their progress. Pull-ups on the low chair translate directly to handstand preparation, while the ladder barrel provides excellent handstand training. Most importantly, a strong powerhouse—Pilates' core concept—makes challenging yoga poses significantly more accessible.

While more yogis did join our mat classes, many couldn't commit to private sessions. This led us to expand our group apparatus offerings, making Pilates more accessible to the yoga community.

Innovation: Yoga on Apparatus

In the early 2000s, I began experimenting with yoga sequences on the reformer and chair. The challenge lay in preserving yoga's flowing breath patterns and spiritual themes while utilizing Pilates equipment. The fusion evolved organically, and I always clarify to students that these classes aren't Pilates—they're yoga practiced on Pilates apparatus.

Kathryn coined the term "YES classes" (Yoga Equipment Series) for these sessions. Regardless of nomenclature, they continue to inspire integration of mind, body, and spirit.

Experience the Connection

Ready to explore this mind-body fusion for yourself? Register for our Yoga on the Chair workshop and discover how these complementary practices can enhance your teaching and personal practice. Get acquainted with a new way of using your chair, take away choreography, teaching tips, and a new format for your arsenal. Can't make it? Register! All participants will have 2 weeks access to the recording.

[Register HERE for North America/Asia](#)

[Register HERE for Europe/Middle East](#)

Celebrate National Yoga Month by embracing the beautiful synergy between these two transformative movement disciplines. Your students—and your own practice—will thank you.