

Become Pilate's flexible friend

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THINK Pilates is all middle class yummy mummies getting themselves into awkward positions, think again.

The flexi exercise programme is becoming more mainstream an activity than going to the loo, if recent reports are anything to go by.

And with anyone from famous footballers like David Beckham to 86 year old grannies realising the potential of the class - isn't it high time you got involved too?



Expert ... Lynne Robinson

Here The Sun's CHARLOTTE MARTIN gets the low down on getting twisted up in the name of fitness with Pilates expert, and author of the very first pilates book: Body Art The Pilates Way, LYNNE ROBINSON.

"Pilates is different to cardio vascular exercise or conditioning work as it trains both mind and body," explains Lynne - who trains the Chelsea football team.

"It will teach you simple things on improving your posture and alignment, how to breathe well, and then to find your deep core muscles, so how to find your centre.

"Then it shows you good movement skills using your strong central muscles.

"And at the base of all of this, it teaches you to be aware of your movement.

"This is the mind bit, constant focus on how you are moving when you do your exercise."

Typically, a Pilates workout will flip you into every position imaginable to work every muscle.

One moment you'll have your legs over your head, another you'll be balancing sideways on your hands - but despite the exercises' complicated nature, everything feels strangely natural and almost relaxing - if they don't, says Lynne, then we aren't getting it right.

But how does a class differ from something like yoga, for instance?

"A lot of people confuse Pilates with yoga - but they are different.

"Pilates doesn't work on a spiritual level - it's about the muscle and skeletal system which is why we are so effective at changing body shape, dealing with injuries and helping joint and muscle problems.

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"Also yoga is more about keeping still; we tend to focus on movement in our classes - which is why it is better for shaping and toning the body."

And while stars like David Beckham indulge in it regularly, can us normal's get involved just as easily?

"Pilates is slowly shaking off it's image of being something primarily middle class.

"It used to be seen as an upper class pastime for people who had time and money for the equipment - or something used by those into performing arts - like ballet dancers.

"But it's taken off nationwide - men and women are finding it an increasingly important part of their fitness regime.

"The sessions used to cost a lot of money - with lots of expensive equipment, but I felt that people should have access to a good teacher whether they could afford it or not, so I wrote a book to help bring it to the mainstream.

"When I wrote *Body Art The Pilates Way*, it was revolutionary - it adapted the original Pilates plan - which is very advanced - so that it could be used for mat work too and any teacher would be able to master it.

"Now what you have is classes throughout the country with mats - so its moved from the hyper hip scene that was so London based before to something the local leisure centre offers.

"My main job now is training Pilates experts - good quality teachers are what's taken it out of the studio and into the mainstream.

"And it really shouldn't be any surprise that men are indulging in Pilates more often now too.

"The very first classes were run with boxers in New York, the female element only came in because New York City ballet girls were in the same building and they gradually edged the men out.

"I've worked with the England cricket team, rowing team and Olympians - both male and female.

"Pilates can do wonders for men and women - it's not gender exclusive."

The power of Pilates

Pilates can help with a whole number of problems - from weight gain to back pain.

- Posture

It will make you stand taller and sit upright - a quick fix to a more streamlined figure.

- Movement

Pilates changes the way you move - which is why teachers have so much success in helping people with joint pain and back pain in conjunction with the medical profession.

- Weight loss/shape change

While you won't drop pounds super fast - any exercise method that builds muscle will improve your metabolic rate.

Combine this with some cardio work and a healthy diet and you can seriously change your shape too.

- Preventing injury

The stronger your deep core muscles are, the less likely you are to get injured.

That is why a footballer like David Beckham would use Pilates

Lynne is co-founder and director of Body Control Pilates Education and of the Body Control Pilates Association, Europe's largest professional body for Pilates teachers.

Top tips for getting into Pilates

- Find a properly qualified teacher

There are a lot of people out there who just don't cut the mustard.

A great teacher will guide you with what is best for you.

Log on to bodycontrol.co.uk to find the best teachers in your area.

- Don't use big classes

A small class will give your teacher the chance to give you the proper directions and individualise the programme for you.

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