Thank you for taking the time to check out Pilates Controlology & Exercises the EasyVigour Way! Before you start, you should know that I am not teaching classical Pilates. You would need to go to an accredited Pilates studio for that. EasyVigour Pilates is Classical Pilates Method in alliance with Alexander Technique and "Fourth Era Physiotherapy". There are certain techniques utilized with each and every exercise. Once you have learned these techniques, you will find them of great help for Pilates Mat Workouts. Even more importantly, the same techniques, when applied through your day will protect and enhance you and the way you move! - Your whole lifestyle will be improved! - Take it from me, they can make a huge difference - Take time to get these instructions right!

Oh, and just a word of encouragement here. It took me a good 2 years to learn to apply the basic Pilates Exercise techniques competently, and I am still improving. The great thing is that benefits occur even before full competency is achieved! If you are struggling to “get it right”, just keep trying, and you will get there.

P.S. Please always work within the comfortable limits of pain or frustration!

P.P.S. If you like the concepts in this free e-book, please check out the EasyVigour Project at the web site address below. More publications will follow!

© Bruce Thomson, Introduction to How to do Pilates Exercise the EasyVigour Way
Publisher: The EasyVigour Project
http://www.easyvigour.net.nz
June 2004
The Relaxation Script

The Relaxation Script: Start

1. Lie in the Relaxation Position (see diagram). Use a comfortable mat or carpet.
2. Support your head with a folded up towel or bath mat, about 3 cm thick.
3. Keep your feet and knees in line with your hips, or a little wider if that is more comfortable.
4. Place hands on abdomen (see diagram) Take a deep breath, hold, then release it slowly.

The Relaxation Script: Action

1. (Breathing In): Raise your shoulders toward your ears.
2. (Breathing out): Lower your shoulders towards your hips.
3. (Breathing normally): Let your shoulders totally relax.
4. Feel your body widen and lengthen.
5. Imagine sand trickling out of your back pockets.
6. Imagine sand trickling out from double pockets on your shirt.
7. Imagine sand trickling from the middle of the back of your neck.
8. Say quietly to yourself: “There is no tension from my toes... to my tail bone... to the frown on my forehead.
9. Repeat the relaxation exercise as often as you need to to get the relaxation to occur. Get to know and enjoy the feeling!

What the Relaxation Script Does:

- Provides a quick and simple relaxation script that can be applied anywhere.
- Teaches “posture-movement awareness”. By doing a relaxation exercise, you are learn to feel the patterns of muscle tension in the body, and also the feel of relaxation from tension.

Comment on Relaxation Techniques

Doing nothing seems a strange way to learn a new exercise program! Nevertheless, you need a relaxation technique! You need to “not do” what is bad and to “do” what is good. “Doing” inappropriate muscle tension - whether during rest or while in movement - is definitely bad! Thus a relaxation technique is the first thing you should apply before any exercise! Indeed you should apply a quick relaxation technique before and during each and every movement during the day!

The Alexander Technique, and "Inhibiting".

"Inhibiting" is pausing to apply a relaxation script at the precise moment that you are likely to tense up. It’s that simple. Take the example of a snooker champion just before hitting the ball. He pauses just at the moment of play. He “inhibits” unnecessary tension by use of a tried and trusted relaxation script. (He might use the relaxation exercises described above, because they can be done standing), thus:

- He “inhibits” unnecessary tension.
- His mind and body tune into each other. This is “posture-movement awareness”.

He is now ready to do his (Alexander style) “Ordering”: those quiet mind to body instructions. For example, he thinks to himself: “Bend at the hips... to achieve alignment of pocket.. with target ball.. with white ball ... with que ... with eye ...” You get the picture!
This page introduces you to “Inhibiting”, or “relaxation at rest and in action”. Please review the references below. Relaxation and the "relaxation script" is a very big subject, and is worthy of further study.

Reference:

4. Relaxation Scripts
The Zip and Hollow:- Start Position

1. Lie on your back in the relaxation position with your knees bent toward your chest.
2. Put your hands on the area of your abdomen that would be covered by the front part of a bikini. (the "bikini patch".
3. Have your thumbs touching at the navel, and your fingers touching at the midline, about 6 cm below the navel.

The Zip and Hollow:- Action

1. Now imagine that you have to zip into a very tight pair of jeans: -
2. Hollow the area under you thumbs and fingers toward your spine. There may only be a very small movement. (Maintain Pelvic Neutral!)
3. Now imagine (if it hasn't already happened), that the area under your fingers is being zipped together like that tight pair of jeans! (keep the rest of your body relaxed, and maintain Pelvic Neutral!)

(If you are having trouble making the above happen, try leaving just one hand over the "bikini patch", and sucking your thumb with the other- suck gently for stage (2), and hard for stage (3)- Sounds weird, but it does help!).

Comments

There are four muscles that are major "joint stabilizers" for the lower back:-

- The Transversus abdominis(1).
- The Multifidus(1).
- The Gluteus maximus, together with its co-contracters(2).
- The Psoas muscle (part of the "Iliopsoas" muscle group)(3).

If you are serious about exercises for low back pain stabilization, you need to learn how to activate all of these muscles!

Reference

4. Dynamic Lumbar stabilization exercises: Fine Control of the Zip and Hollow

(Chronic low back pain stabilization exercises, Zip and Hollow, transversus abdominis, Scroll right>>>....)
Fine Control of the Zip and Hollow- Start Position

- Lie in the Relaxation Position in pelvic neutral.
- Imagine four buttons along the mid line of your abdomen:-
  1. On the pubic symphysis.
  2. Mid-way between the pubic symphysis and the belly button.
  3. On the belly button.
  4. Just below the breast bone.

Fine Control of the Zip and Hollow- Action

1. Lengthen up through the spine and tuck your chin slightly.
2. Gently zip and hollow over button 1.
3. Gently zip and hollow from buttons 1 to 2.
4. Gently zip and hollow from button 1 to 3.
5. Gently zip and hollow over the entire mid line of your abdomen.
6. Now slowly increase the force of the zip and hollow over the entire length of your abdominal mid-line -increase gradually, and keep the rest of your body relaxed!
7. Now relax back to a gentle level 1 or 2 zip and hollow. Try to maintain this level throughout your day!

Watch Points:-

Maintain a relaxed and properly positioned body, specifically:-

- Avoid that "tight assed" feel!
- Don't let the Rectus abdominus (the "washboard abs") cut in.
- Gently anchor your scapulas!
- Maintain Pelvic Neutral.
- You should be able to breathe easily.

A Dynamic Stabilization Exercise:-

- Applying a gentle zip and hollow through the day means that the transversus abdominis will automatically trigger when required to dynamically fulfil its role in lumbar stability.

Comments

The most subtle part of the zip and hollow is to contract the front part of your pelvic floor muscles without gripping about the anus or under the tail bone (that's that "tight assed" feel).

- In women, it should feel like sucking water up into the vagina!
- In men, the movement is "raising the urethra" - imagine wading into a very cold river!

Zip and Hollow throughout the day!

- Once you have mastered the gentle zip and hollow while in the relaxation position, try it lying on your stomach, and standing.
- During most activities, such as walking, jogging or gardening, you only need to zip and hollow to level 1 or 2.

Reference

- Pilates Lumbar stabilization exercises (1): The Zip and Hollow

(Dynamic Lumbar stabilization exercises for the lower abdominal muscles, Scroll right>>>>....)
Pilates Pelvic Clock, Pelvic Alignment Exercises

Pelvic Neutral: Start

1. Lie down in the Relaxation Position

Before we can find “Pelvic Neutral” alignment, we need to explore the full range of pelvic tilt.

Pelvic Neutral: Action

Caution! Do not push your pelvic tilt beyond the level of mild discomfort! The first thing we are going to do is explore the full range of pelvic tilt.

1. Imagine there is a clock face attached to the front of your pelvis and looking forward.
2. Make your clock face "look upward" toward your head by tilting your pelvis so that 6 o'clock is higher than 12 o'clock. Hold, and take a couple of shallow breathes.
3. Now make your pelvic "clock face" look downward by tilting your pelvis so that 6 o'clock is below 12 o'clock. Hold and take a couple of shallow breathes.
4. Now come back to the centre of your pelvic range of movement. You should still have a small natural arch in your back (not quite enough to get your fingers under). Relax, and get the feel of pelvic neutral into your mind!

The "pelvic clock face" is now looking straight ahead. This is Pelvic Neutral!

What this Exercises do:

- Places the joint between the hips and the spine (lumbo-sacral joint) at its mid-point.
- Teaches the feel of pelvic neutral.

Comment

- This is the first of the pelvic alignment exercises!
- The lumbo-sacral joint is one of the most vulnerable joints in the body. 50% of lumbar disc herniations occur at this point!
- All joints are strongest and least prone to damage at or around their “mid-point”. The lumbo-sacral joint is no exception to this rule!

You and your body do not automaticalaly know a joint's strong middle point, but they can be taught!

Further information on Pelvic Alignment Exercises, refer:-

"Left Looking, or twisted Pelvis"

Reference

1. Shirley A Sahrmann: Diagnosis and Treatment of Movement Impairment Syndromes; Publ. Mosby 2002

© Bruce Thomson EasyVigour Project (scroll up^^^^.....)
Breathing Experiments, Start Position:-

1. Sit in a high backed kitchen or office chair with your buttock well back in the seat and the lean back so that your back is fully supported.
2. Think "spine lengthen upward".
3. Place your left hand over the left side of your rib cage - thumb touching the ribs at the back, and index finger touching ribs at the front.
4. Place your right hand over your solar plexus.
5. Now try two different styles of breathing!

(1) Chair Sitter's Breathing- Action:-

1. Breathe slowly and deeply. Relax - do not hyperventilate!
2. Which parts move as you breathe? - Your abdomen? - Perhaps the front of your chest?

(2) Pilates Breathing (Back & Sides Breathing):-

1. Gently zip and hollow your lower abdomen. (refer "Zip and Hollow" and "Zip, Fine Control").
2. Breathe slowly and deeply, through your nose and stay relaxed - again, do not hyperventilate!
3. Which parts move as you breathe now? Your upper abdomen? The sides of your chest? Possibly also the ribs at the back of your chest are now also moving?

(3) Pilates Breathing Technique: Wringing the breathe out:-

Place your fingers as in the lower two diagrams. This will allow you to monitor the movement of your ribs just below the sternum. Take a deep breathe in, and note the expansion between your fingers. Now breathe out, and note the decreased gap between your fingers. Pause and wring the breathe out by closing the gap between your fingers further, and after another pause, do it again!

Why do Pilates Style Breathing?:-

Pilates himself had asthma as a child, and he adapted this style of breathing from yoga (7,8). Back and sides breathing is also recommended by Alexander Teachers(6). Simple enough to teach as breathing exercises for both children and seniors with asthma.

It also promotes spinal stability. See following discussion, also page 26.

Pilates Breathing Stabilizes your Lumbar Spine.

Refer back to your experience when you tried "Chair Sitter's Breathing". When you breathed in, you noticed that your rib cage tilted so as to "look upward" and that your mid spine (the middle of your back) arched. Can you understand how a deep breath can push your middle spine outside of its strong middle range, & how Pilates breathing can stop that? - Here are examples:-

(1) Pilates Breathing brings Control and Poise to Professional Singers:-

At an amateur singing competition, contestants were reminded not to move shoulders and arms while breathing in - You wouldn't see Pavarotti doing that, nor would you see Pilates do it!

(2) Pilates Breathing brings Control and Stability to those who Run:-

20 years ago I trained hard for a half marathon. I never made it. I developed mid and lower back pain with sensory loss to the side of my foot - signs of L5-S1 disc protrusion. For many years after that, my mid lumbar spine felt vulnerable if I took deep breaths during running. Pilates breathing fixed that - I don't feel vulnerable nowadays.

Reference:-

3. ABC of Yoga.com: Advanced Breathing Techniques
4. Biography of Joseph Pilates

© Bruce Thomson EasyVigour Project scroll up^^^....
Buttocks Exercises(1) While Standing, Start Position:-
1. Stand upright and relaxed with your feet hip width apart and your toes pointing slightly outwards and unlock your knees.
2. Your pelvis should be in "neutral".
3. Gently zip and hollow your lower abdomen.

Action:-
1. Tense your gluteals, & hold for 3 seconds - you can check that the Gluteus maximus has engaged by placing a hand over the relevant area (see picture below) - repeat 3-5 times.

Buttocks Exercises(2) At "Heel Strike":-
1. Stand as for "Engage Gluteus maximus while Standing".
2. Start walking: Each time your foot lands, engage your Gluteus maximus on that side.

Buttocks Exercises(3) Walking on Sharp Pebbles
1. Make sure that you are in bare feet, and imagine that you are walking on sharp, painful pebbles! You should find that -
   - Your foot lands very gently!
   - Heal and toe land at the same time!
   - Knee over foot, not behind it!
2. Pause just after your foot has landed and at the moment that you are standing on one foot, and take note whether your Gluteus maximus is engaging! - (2-4 minutes is a good workout).

Comment (1) - What Gluteus maximus Contraction Does:
It takes rough surface walking to "trigger" the latent stabilizing power of the Gluteus. With "Walking on Sharp Pebbles", you will have noticed that your Gluteus maximus tended to engage, your knees tended not to collapse inwards, and your foot arches found it easy to form just as they are supposed to. Modern shoeing and smooth sidewalks have taken away this natural "buttocks firming" stimulus. Worse still, the "lazy Gluteus" is even lazier when the back is sore or the ankle is sprained(3). The laziness of this lower back & hip stabilizer is a disaster for modern musculo-skeletal health(1,2). Hence the need for Gluteus maximus engagement with exercises to firm the buttocks!

Comment (2) - Buttocks firming is definitely part of the traditional Pilates workout! - just listen to Mari Winsor in her phenomenally successful Pilates Video Series ('Sculpt your Body Slim') as she describes the Roll Up: ("Squeeze your tushie and engage your power house")

Comment (3): The Gluteus maximus is a dynamic stabilizer! - Only engage the Gluteus maximus at heel strike, when squatting, bending forward or climbing stairs! Keep it relaxed at all other times.

2. Bruce Thomson: Engage Gluteus maximus!

(Exercises, thighs, buttocks, & © Bruce Thomson, EasyVigour Project)

(Walking exercises thighs as well as buttocks Scroll right >>>..)
The Scapular Anchor for Scapular Winging

The Scapular Anchor:- Start Position

1. Stand relaxed and point with your arm at a spot on the floor about one meter in front of your feet.
2. While relaxing your right shoulder, let your arm elongate toward the spot on the floor.
3. Reach your left hand up behind your back and touch the lower left corner of your right shoulder blade. It should be easy to find because it will be sticking out from your back (this is called scapular winging).

The Scapular Anchor:- Action

1. While continuing to point at the spot on the floor, attempt to bring the lower left corner of your shoulder blade back close to your back. You will have to work hard to do this.
2. Point at a spot on the floor 45 degrees to the right of your feet, and hold the lower left point of your shoulder blade close to your back. Use the least amount of muscle tension that will do this.
3. Bring your right arm back down to your side, & hold the lower left point of your shoulder blade close to your back. Use the least amount of muscle tension that will do this. This should take very little effort.
4. As a final check, use your left hand to check that your right Latissimus dorsi is relaxed.

(Exercises alone will not fix or prevent scapular winging & round shoulders - you need to become "posturally aware" as well. In severe cases of scapular winging, there may be a surgically treatable nerve deficit - see ref (2) - Scroll right>>>>....)

Comment: Management of Scapular Winging: This exercise works the "Scapular Anchors": The Lower Trapezius & the Serratus anterior. These muscles are often weak, causing the shoulder blade to be poorly positioned. Poor shoulder blade positioning contributes to muscle strains & rotator cuff injuries(1). Use your scapular anchors throughout the day! - Your shoulder muscles will perform better, & you will save yourself a lot of pain!

Pictures: Left - The lower trapezius. Right - The Serratus anterior (viewed from the front).

Reference

2. Steven Fromm: Treatment, Management, Pictures, Scapular Winging http://freespace.virgin.net/steven.fromm/ - © Bruce Thomson, EasyVigour Project scroll up^^^^....
"Pilates hurts my Neck!!" - The Neck Roll and Chin Tuck will Help!

The Neck Roll and Chin Tuck:- Start Position

1. Lie in the relaxation position, knees bent and arm resting on lower abdomen.
2. Gently anchor the scapulas.
3. You may use a thin pillow under your head, but try not to.

The Neck Roll and Chin Tuck:- Action
First relax and free up your neck:

1. Place the "Buddha" or "Mona Lisa" smile on your face, let your tongue widen at its base and your neck gently lengthen at the back.
2. Let your shoulder blades melt into the floor. A couple of slow deep breaths will aid this.
3. Now slowly roll your head. First to the right, then slowly to the left.
4. Repeat a few times.

Once your neck is free:

1. Bring your head to the centre.
2. Tuck your chin in. Keep your head on the floor and let the back of your neck lengthen. Imagine you are holding a ripe peach under your chin. This is a small, relaxed and subtle movement.

You are now ready to perform the Pilates One Hundred with the head and neck in best positioning and with minimum tension!

("Pilates hurts my Neck!!" - scroll right>>>>....)

But Pilates Hurts my Neck!!...
Don't be discouraged. Pilates is wonderful for finding weaknesses, and even sports pro's find Pilates difficult to start with. Here are three suggestions:-
(1) During the moves that hurt, keep you head resting on the floor (diagram 1).
(2) After class, gently work on the sore neck by doing the "chin tuck and look between knees" by itself as a Pilates exercise (diagram 3).
(3) During your day, avoid "head forward and down". For example, when bringing a soup spoon to your mouth, bend at your hips to let your whole torso come forward, lengthen your neck & tuck your chin.

Reference

Chin tucks and "Pilates hurts my neck" © Bruce Thomson, EasyVigour Project
Stand Tall, Walk Tall

This exercise is presented at the end of the Introduction to EasyVigour Pilates, but would fit just as well in a manual of training for How to do the Alexander Technique. For extra information, try this search (also reference "4" at the end of this page)

**Alexander Technique, Releasing and Lengthening Taller**

**Stand Tall, Walk Tall - Start Position**

1. Like all Pilates exercises, do this bare foot!
2. Imagine that there is a buoyancy balloon in your head located above and between your ears. Let the balloon elongate your neck away from your shoulders. Feel the back of your neck elongate & your chin tuck slightly.
3. Anchor your scapulas.
4. "Attach" an imaginary weight to your tailbone. Your spine is now elongating between a weighted tail bone and a "lighter than air" skull. Your back still keeps its natural curve. Your pelvis should be in "neutral".
5. Gently zip and hollow your lower abdomen.
6. Gently engage your Gluteus maximus muscles.
7. Unlock your knees, and check in the mirror that the knee caps are not pointing inwards.
8. Place your feet hip width apart with the insides of your feet parallel.
9. Let your foot arches form by pushing your toes & the balls of your toes firmly toward the ground.

**Action (Swayback):**

In this example, the person is not engaging the gluteal muscles.

**Action (Much Improved):** In this example, the person is engaging the gluteals at heel strike, and is well on the way to "Releasing and Lengthening Taller" but is still somewhat tense.

**Stand Tall, Walk Tall: Action**

1. Try to do all the "stand tall" instructions while walking!
2. Also make sure that the knee comes forward with the lower leg and Tensor fascia lata muscle totally relaxed!
3. Impossible isn't it! -

**Comments**

In fact, it will take a course of EasyVigour Pilates Exercises and Instructions to achieve the walk tall instructions!

When I started to develop the EasyVigour Pilates method, I had all the faults (and more!) that are pictured to the left. Running and Power walking felt rough. I was carrying a lot of pain. The EasyVigour Pilates method has changed that. I hope that the method can help you too!

**What it does**

- Makes walking as smooth and effortless as driving a Citroen car!

**Reference**

2. Bruce Thomson: OBP of Tennis Elbow
4. Philip Goddard: THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE A brief guide to the basics

(Do Alexander Technique, Alexander Technique Releasing and Lengthening Taller) © Bruce Thomson, EasyVigour Project scroll up^...