

Pilates Exercises Improve Physical Fitness and Brain Health

Many of us will survive into old age, thanks to modern medicine. Health and longevity are influenced by genetics and environment as well as by our behavior, but it is unlikely that many of us will remain fully healthy and avoid cognitive decline if we aren't active. Most sedentary adults over age 45 are likely to have poor cardiovascular health, hypertension, obesity, and/or diabetes, all risk factors for age-related physical degeneration as well as for cognitive decline.

Research demonstrates that regular activity lowers the risk of cognitive decline because it stimulates the growth of new neurons in the brain, improves cerebral blood flow, and increases gray matter volume in brain structures that are central to cognitive functioning.

Pilates is an excellent choice for an adaptable form of exercise that requires both cognitive and motor learning, making it more beneficial for most people than doing simple repetitive exercises. Pilates exercises are slow and controlled, focusing on the core muscles in the back, hips, quadriceps, and hamstrings, all of which support the spine and pelvis. In addition to strengthening core muscles, the exercises increase blood flow and strengthen bones and cartilage, and they also improve balance, endurance, and mood.

Pilates can be performed on a mat with the option of using small equipment like blocks and balls, or on various pieces of specialized apparatus on which the level of difficulty can be individually varied by adjusting springs. You can have individual sessions or group classes that take place in person or virtually, ideally participating two or three times weekly in line with the CDC recommended

exercise guidelines. Because of its adaptability, this form of exercise has been found to be particularly suitable and safe for older adults, even if they are frail.

Pilates can be preventative medicine and a therapeutic agent. Joseph Pilates developed his technique in the 1920s to train dancers who were prone to injury, and it is frequently recommended by orthopedists for people who are recovering from injuries. But it is also enjoyed by people of all ages who are interested in staying fit and resilient and maintaining a healthy level of self-esteem.

People of any age should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow; the goal should be to learn to enjoy what your body can do. As an 82-year-old competitor in the 2022 National Senior Games track-and-field event said, “You got to keep moving.”