

How yoga and Pilates benefit beginners

28 June 2018, by Scott Gilbert



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The idea of going for a run or joining a gym can be intimidating for people who don't exercise. When you have a health condition that prevents you from engaging in many types of high-impact exercise, it can also be tough to know where to start.

Yoga and Pilates are two forms of low-impact [exercise](#) that people of all ages and [fitness levels](#) can do to improve both their physical and mental well-being.

Dr. Jayson Loeffert, a primary-care sports medicine physician at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, said both are also popular because they require little if any special equipment. Plus, once you learn how to do the moves correctly, they can be done in the comfort of your own home.

"Both use your own body weight and can be tailored for levels from beginner to advanced," Loeffert said.

Pilates focuses on strengthening the core muscles between the shoulders and pelvis, called the "powerhouse," while [yoga](#) often incorporates a mind-body connection and can include elements of meditation and breathing techniques. According to the American Osteopathic Association, one of the benefits of yoga is how it helps a person manage stress.

"That can be beneficial for your mental health, as well," Loeffert said.

He recommends attending a class for beginners where an instructor can lead you through the poses and watch your form to make sure you are doing them correctly. Both exercises include slow, careful movements that can improve strength, balance and flexibility.

The exercises are typically practiced barefoot with a floor mat while wearing clothing that allows for ease of movement.

Because yoga and Pilates are low impact, they are a good fit for people with arthritis or those dealing with other injuries. "Most people can tolerate it without much problem," he said. "It's good for healing."

People with diabetes, high blood pressure or neuropathy in their legs can also see benefits from the slow movements that build muscles and improve the metabolism, which helps regulate blood sugar.

Barbara Cole, a nurse practitioner with Penn State Health Medical Group at Park Avenue in State College, said yoga and Pilates can help with management of chronic conditions; preventing and treating back pain; improving posture and balance; advancing range of motion; and making it easier to get a good night's sleep.

"It can also reduce stress and anxiety while increasing your overall fitness," she said.

She recommends that pregnant women, [people](#) with [high blood pressure](#), risk of blood clots, herniated disks or other pre-existing conditions check with their doctor before beginning a program.

Although neither yoga nor Pilates are considered to be cardiovascular exercises, participants can still increase their heart rate while practicing. Loeffert said, "I do think you get some cardio benefits, so if that's your only activity, it's better than nothing."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

APA citation: How yoga and Pilates benefit beginners (2018, June 28) retrieved 2 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-yoga-pilates-benefit-beginners.html>

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