



Welcome to
THE SPRING TRAINING SECTION

In this month's training section, improve your stability in the saddle with Julie Driver's **equestrian Pilates exercises** (see below), then work on engaging your horse's core with Sue Palmer's **horse 'Pilates' routine (p20)**. Plus, IH trainer Joanna O'Neill offers advice on **Riding and Leading (p23)**, while Kelly Marks answers your **questions about the Dually (p26)**.



Photo courtesy of Joanna Lowes

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WHY PILATES?
Pilates is an accumulative discipline that when practised regularly helps the rider develop the control in their own body to communicate clearly and calmly with the horse

5 'go-to' PILATES EXERCISES FOR EQUESTRIANS

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Photo courtesy of Julie Driver

WHAT IS PILATES?

In 1940 German born Joseph Hubertus Pilates published "Return to Life", a sequence of 34 matwork exercises named "Contrology".

These exercises should flow seamlessly one into the next. Pilates also developed larger studio apparatus that use spring resistance. After his death in 1967 the system became known simply as 'Pilates'.

How can Pilates help equestrians?

Pilates assists the rider to find the control necessary in their own body to communicate clearly and calmly with the horse. As horse and rider, there are two living and breathing creatures that have their own individual asymmetries and biomechanics; two spines coming together in a dynamic relationship, linked by a saddle. The effect of riding can impact both partners, not just the rider after they dismount.

"Clearing the Lines of Communication"

The aim is to build a better partnership through good movement patterns, helping the rider to develop stamina and stability along with the mobility to develop a deep, sound seat. Without a sound seat there may be extraneous movement, 'wiggling around' and weight shifting. This constant and unnecessary re-balancing can mask the aids the rider is trying to give to their horse and the rider may feel the horse is not "listening" to them. Developing a sound seat is the beginning

of developing a deeper relationship and can prevent a lot of misunderstanding! One of the greatest skills a rider can develop is the awareness to bring their body back into balance if their balance becomes lost.

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WHAT IS 'NEUTRAL'?

Neutral pelvis and spine is the starting point for most Pilates exercises.

The relevance to your seat is clear – if your hip bones shoot in front of your pubic bone, your back will arch and if your pubic bone curls underneath your back will round and you may slump backwards. Being correctly aligned in our own body is the best way to create the mix of stability and mobility needed when you're riding.

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Finding neutral pelvis

Begin by aligning the bony points of your lower body. Think of your belly button as north, your pubic bone as south and your hip crests as east and west. If you're lying down, neutral pelvis is achieved when the bones of your hips and your pubic bone are level with each other horizontally. When your body is vertical, such as sitting or standing, the bones of your hips are level with each other horizontally and with your pubic bone vertically.

Finding neutral spine

The spine is naturally curved like the letter S, which gives it a shock-absorbing quality. When the bones of the spine are stacked correctly, the weight of your head and ribs are distributed down through the spinal column. The better you become at aligning your spine and pelvis, the better you can organise and co-ordinate your limbs. This will help to improve your aids and make you a better partner for your horse.

i BREATHING & BALANCE

Breathing plays a large part in our spinal stability and our horses can sense how we are feeling via our breath patterns, particularly when we shallow breath or hold our breath and tense up.

This simple exercise helps to bring focus to our breathing patterns. Remember to breathe out when moving during the exercises.

1 Place your hands around the base of your ribcage and try to feel the ribs expand and lift as you breathe into the back, sides and bottom of the ribs.

2 When you breathe out, really focus on expelling the air and feeling the lower ribs drop and move together as you exhale.

3 If you can allow this to happen then there will be a natural intake of breath that expands the bottom of the lungs.

If you are practising Pilates regularly you'll begin to develop an improved sense of alignment as well as an improvement in balance. These exercises are helpful in developing balance for daily life as well as in the saddle!

“Above all, learn how to breathe correctly.”
Joseph Pilates

IH Training Section

THE EXERCISES

There are so many fabulous exercises to choose from, both on the mat and using small props and the larger studio equipment. Here are a few that can make a difference if practised regularly. If possible try to find yourself a local class and teacher who can guide you through a full class. Enjoy!



Check your pelvis is neutral before you begin



Lift as high as the tip of the shoulder blades

1 SPINE CURL

By lifting the spine “bone by bone” this exercises, mobilises and strengthens the muscles of the spine and hips.

START POSITION

Begin lying on your mat with your feet hip width apart and parallel. Check your pelvis is neutral before you begin.

MOVEMENT

- 1 Breathe in to prepare
- 2 Breathe out to lift the spine bone by bone away from the mat, lift as high as the tip of the shoulder blades

TIP✓

As you begin to lift the hips away from the mat check that your hips remain level and you do not ‘drop’ to one side. Imagine your spine is a wheel as you peel each vertebra away from the mat one at a time

- 3 Breathe in to keep the spine lifted
- 4 Breathe out to roll the spine back to the mat.

REPS 5-10

2 DART

This exercise helps to mobilise and strengthen the muscles of the upper back. It is a great exercise for offsetting the rounding forward of the spine that we get from sitting at a desk, using a smart phone and general fatigue. It also uses the inner thighs.

START POSITION

Lie on your front with your hands by your sides, resting your forehead on the mat. Your legs are together.

MOVEMENT

- 1 Breathe in to prepare
- 2 Breathe out lift the head, neck and upper chest away from the mat, at the same time reach your hands towards your feet to open the chest and squeeze the legs together. Lengthen the legs along the mat without lifting them.

TIP✓

Lift the head, neck and shoulders but keep the lower ribs on the mat. Lengthen the legs away and keep the feet on the mat



Lie on your front with your hands by your sides



Breathe out lift the head neck and upper chest away from the mat

REPS 6-8



Lie on your front with your head resting on your hands



Circle the leg 6 times clockwise and then 6 times anti clockwise

TIP ✓
Only lift the leg as high as you can keep your pelvis and spine still

3 PRONE LEG LIFT & CIRCLES

This exercise helps develop hip mobility and pelvic stability.

START POSITION

Lie on your front with your head resting on your hands. Your legs should be slightly wider than hip width.

MOVEMENT - LEG LIFT

- 1 Breath in to prepare
- 2 Breath out lift your left leg
- 3 Breath in to lower the leg

MOVEMENT - LEG CIRCLES

- 1 Breath in to prepare
- 2 Breath out to lift the leg
- 3 Breath naturally as you circle the leg 6 times clockwise and then 6 times anti clockwise

REPS 8-10 on each leg

4 SIDE LYING LEGS

This exercise strengthens the muscles of the hip while challenging pelvic and spinal stability. The aim is to only move the leg and not the body.

START POSITION

Lie on your side with your underneath leg bent to support you. Hip stacked over hip and shoulder over shoulder.

MOVEMENT

- 1 Lift your top leg to hip height in line with your socket.
- 2 Breathe in to prepare
- 3 Breathe out to lift your top leg 2-3 inches above hip height
- 4 Breathe out to lower your leg back to hip height.

REPS 8 times on each leg

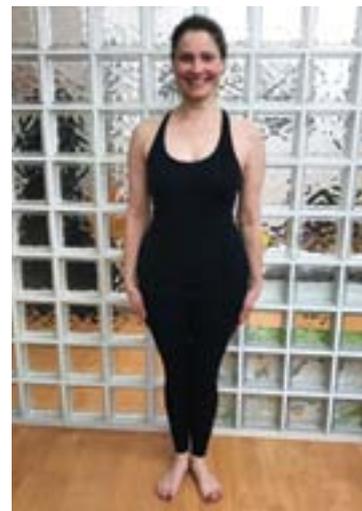
TIP ✓
Keep the movement in the hip joint so the back doesn't move. If necessary keep the range of movement smaller so your back stays still



Lie on your side with your underneath leg bent to support you



Breathe out to lift your top leg 2-3 inches above hip height



Stand with heels together and toes apart



Rise up onto the balls of the feet

TIP ✓
As you lift try to go directly upwards and not tip forward or bend at the waist or hips

5 STANDING BALANCE

This exercise is great for beginning to improve balance and is so simple it can be done anywhere!

START POSITION

Stand with your heels together and toes apart. The distance between the big toes should be about a fist's gap.

MOVEMENT

- 1 Breathe in to prepare
- 2 Breathe out and rise up onto the balls of the feet
- 2 Breathe in and keep the heels lifted
- 2 Breathe out and lower the heels back to the floor

REPS 8-10 times