

STAND AND DELIVER

when performed vertically, pilates moves force you to activate more muscles to counter the effects of gravity, so you get a more intense workout—and faster results

BY KARYN STAPLES, MPT, OCS

At my studio, ProHealth Physical Therapy and Pilates in Peachtree City, GA, I encourage patients and clients to apply what they learn during sessions to their daily life. I especially enjoy the Standing Pilates repertoire because it utilizes classical Pilates principles while challenging our bodies in the position in which we spend a lot of time—upright. It is both mentally and physically challenging: training your core to work in a vertical position, improving your balance and keeping your “zipper” (my cue for the pelvic floor and abdominal connection) working all the time.

As a physical therapist and Polestar Pilates-certified instructor, I’m always looking for new things to use on my clients and patients. Last year I came across Joan Breibart’s book, *Standing Pilates: Strengthen and Tone Your Body Wherever You Are* (Wiley, 2004), read it, and decided that Standing Pilates would be an ideal “research intervention” (like a long, formal study) for my doctoral dissertation; I am currently pursuing my DSc degree in physical therapy, with a focus on orthopedics and sports through Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions. The purpose of the study is to assess the effect of performing Breibart’s Standing Pilates repertoire on balance in an aging female population.

Though my research focuses on a specific group, Standing Pilates can help everyone.

Traditional Pilates assists you in finding your powerhouse and becoming aware of alignment. By doing the same movements in an upright position, you experience the influence of gravity on the body and come to feel, firsthand, how vital the core is in all the things we do. We need to engage it during all of our daily activities to center and align our bodies and counteract the effects of gravity.

Another major benefit of Standing Pilates is that, unlike traditional Pilates, it is a weight-bearing exercise, which is key for building strong bones and preventing osteoporosis. It also introduces balance challenges. Balance requires practice, and as we age, we do not challenge our balance often enough.

(When was the last time you walked on a curb like a balance beam?) This workout will also strengthen your legs, target your powerhouse and tone your arms.

When performing this routine, keep your abdominal muscles engaged (navel to spine), perform lateral rib cage breathing to maintain a tall and strong trunk, and maintain your weight on the tripod of the foot (big toe, little toe, heel)—no falling arches! I recommend that you do this workout once a week, along with your normal Pilates routine, if you are working toward a fitness goal (e.g., preparing for a marathon or triathlon), twice a week if you are just looking to get started on something new, three times a week if you are doing nothing else or if you have been diagnosed as at risk for osteoporosis. And remember: Balance comes from the core!



HUNDRED

purpose: warms up the body; increases body awareness; enhances core connection

setup: Stand on a mat with your feet parallel and slightly apart, hands pressing together a few inches in front of your breastbone, as if you were praying. Imagine that you have a string attached to your head pulling you up toward the ceiling.

1. Inhale and then exhale, engaging your abdominals and pelvic floor while you curl your upper body slightly forward.

2. Inhale and slide your left leg forward, foot pointed. Exhale and engage your right leg muscles and foot, anchoring your body into the ground.

3. Maintaining this position, inhale for 4 counts, then exhale for 6 counts. Do 5 repetitions for a total of 50 breaths.

4. Inhale as you slide your left leg back to start. Repeat steps 2–4 with your right leg.

tip: Remember to zip up the midline of your body and create resistance and length as you curl.

modification: Do the exercise without the upper-body curl if you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis.

advanced: Add a leg lift and arm beats to the exercise.

2



1



advanced



LEG CIRCLES

purpose: increases balance; allows the ball of the hip joint to move in the socket

setup: Stand on a mat with your arms at your sides and reaching strongly toward the mat. Anchor your right foot onto the mat, placing your weight on the ball and heel of your right foot and keeping your abdominals engaged and your body reaching tall. Reach your left leg out in front of your body, toes pointed and touching the floor.

1. Inhale as you engage your powerhouse, then exhale as you slide your left foot forward as far as you can while keeping your toes grounded and maintaining your balance.

2. Draw clockwise circles with your left leg, using your left big toe as the “pen.” Do 5 repetitions, inhaling for the first half of the circle and exhaling for the second half of the circle. Reverse circle and repeat.

3. Exhale and bring your left leg back in line with your right leg. Inhale to reconnect to your powerhouse, then repeat with your right leg.

tips: Focus on stabilizing the supporting leg. Don’t lock the knee of the supporting leg.

modification: Use a support surface (wall or stable chair) for balance.

advanced: Reach your arms overhead and add a leg lift as you circle. Circle in front and behind your body.

ROLLING LIKE A BALL

purpose: works spinal articulation into flexion

setup: Stand on a mat, feet slightly apart and in parallel, and place your hands on your pelvis. Engage your abdominals.

1. Inhale to find your foot tripod (place your weight on the ball and heel of right left foot) then exhale and engage your pelvic floor and abdominals.

2. Inhale and, keeping your legs parallel, squat down about 5 inches.

3. Exhale while lifting your left knee toward your chest while you simultaneously do a slight upper-body curl, arms coming around as if you were hugging a tree.

4. Inhale as you extend your right leg behind you, reaching your toes to the floor while you open your spine back to neutral.

5. Exhale and repeat steps 3–4 with your right leg.

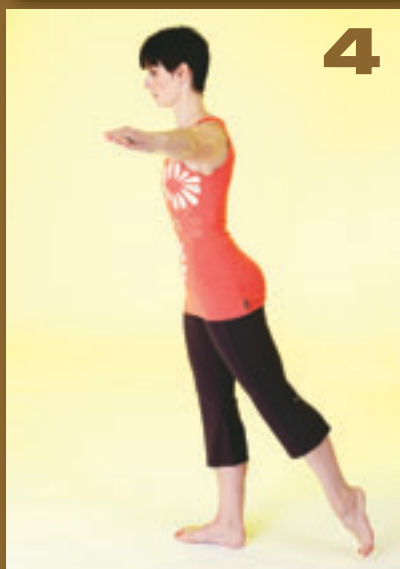
6. Inhale and return your right leg behind your body while bringing your spine back to neutral. Exhale and return your left leg to start.

7. Do 2 repetitions. Repeat with your left leg.

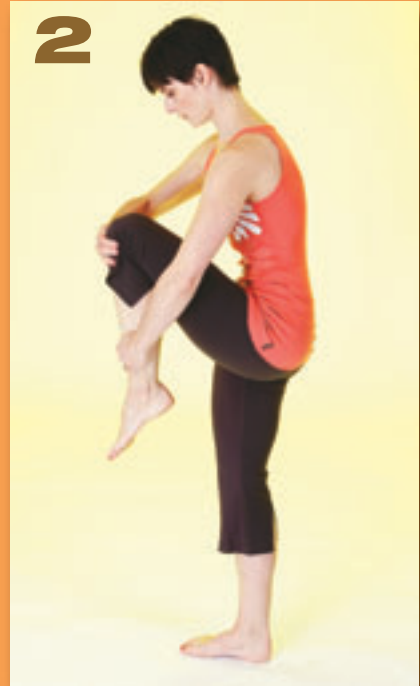
tip: Keep your stabilizing leg slightly bent and your torso lifted at all times.

modification: Touch a wall or a sturdy chair for balance.

advanced: Keep your hands in prayer position and don't allow your moving leg to touch the floor. Move your arms from the hug a tree position to an overhead position when your leg is behind your body.



2



SINGLE-LEG STRETCH

purpose: increases core stability and balance; allows the ball of the hip joint to move in the socket

setup: Same as for Single-Leg Circles.

1. Inhale, lengthening the body and keeping both feet anchored into the mat.

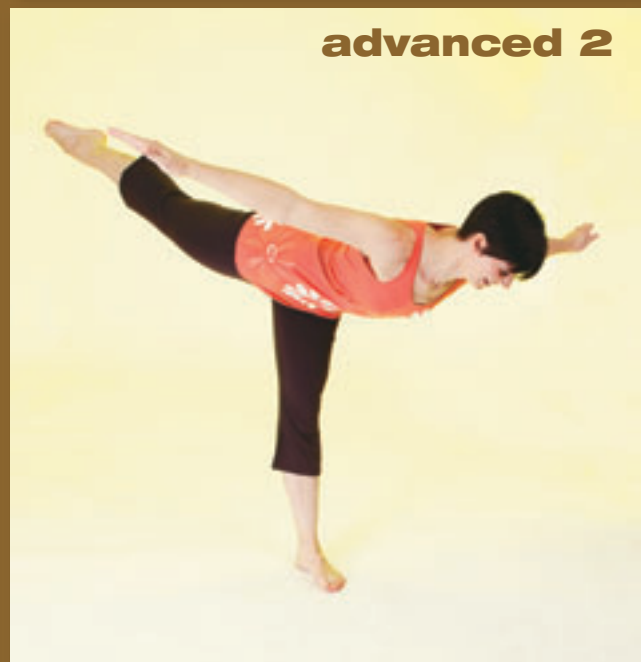
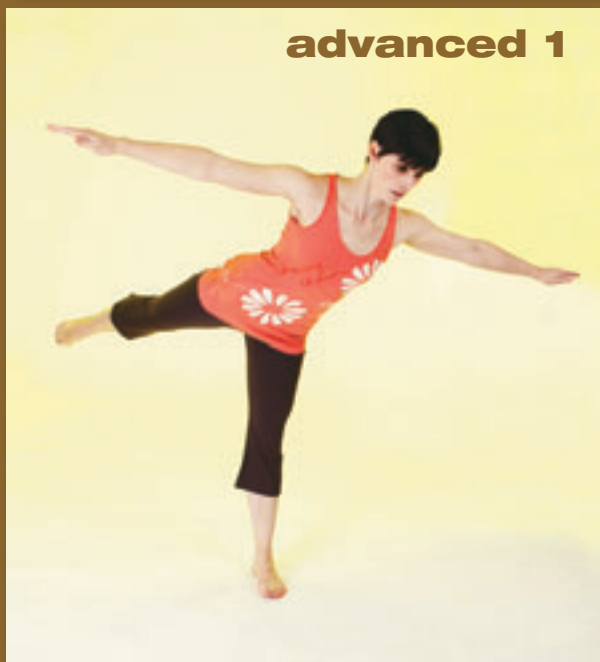
2. Exhale and do an upper-body curl while you simultaneously fold your left knee into your chest and place your left hand on your left ankle and your right hand on your left knee. Maintain this position for two breaths.

3. Inhale and return to the starting position. Do 2 repetitions on each leg.

tips: Keep your pelvis level as you move your leg, especially while bringing your leg to the front. Maintain a strong supporting leg, but don't lock your knee.

modification: Lightly hold on to a wall or a sturdy chair for balance, or do the exercise without the curl.

advanced: Begin with your arms overhead.



SIDE-KICK

purpose: strengthens the glutes; allows the ball of the hip joint to move in the socket; increases balance

setup: Stand on a mat with your arms extended out to your sides at shoulder-height, feet shoulder-width apart.

1. Exhale and lengthen your entire body from your core.
2. Inhale and slide your right foot out to your right side as far as possible, keeping your toes touching the floor.
3. Exhale and do a side-bend to the left so that your right foot is raised off the floor, making sure your core doesn't bend. Keeping your abdominals engaged,

hold the position for a complete inhale and exhale.

4. Inhale and return to center, then exhale, regrounding your body.

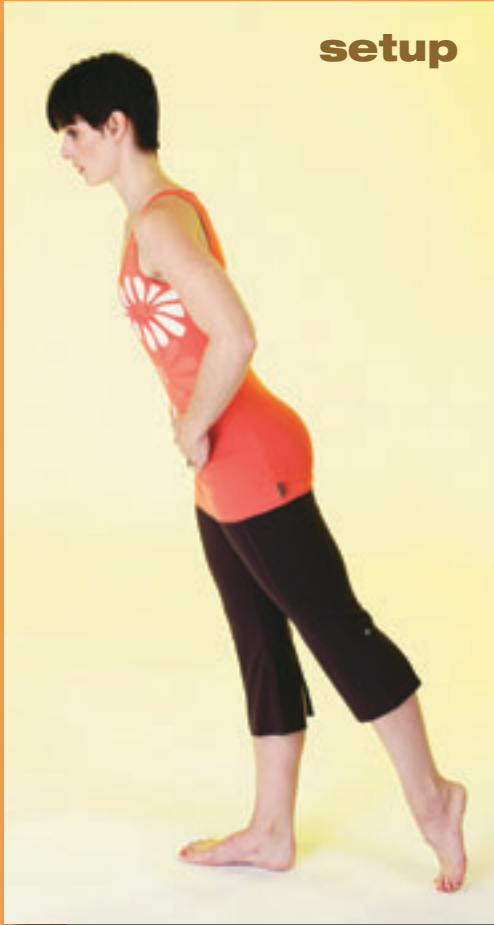
5. Do 3 repetitions on each side, alternating sides between reps.

tip: Keep in mind that this exercise is a torso-lengthening movement, not a lateral bend—your leg is moving away for your midline.

modification: Keep your foot/toes touching the ground, or touch a surface.

advanced: There are 3 variations: Add a torso pivot after side body lean; add a torso pivot followed by seesaw; or bend and straighten the lifted leg.

setup



LEG KICK-BACK

purpose: increases balance; strengthens the spinal muscles

setup: Same as for Rolling Like a Ball.

1. Inhale, slide your left leg backward, keeping your toes on the floor but allowing your heel to lift off the mat.

2. Exhale as you bend your body forward, maintaining a stiff spine and moving your left leg back so that your body starts to move into a seesaw position.

3. Inhale as you continue to bring your body into a seesaw position so that your body is in a long line parallel to the floor.

4. Exhale and actively tighten your left hamstring as you bend your left knee.

5. Inhale and maintain the seesaw position until your left toes touch the mat again.

6. Do 4 seesaw motions on your left side. Repeat on your right side.

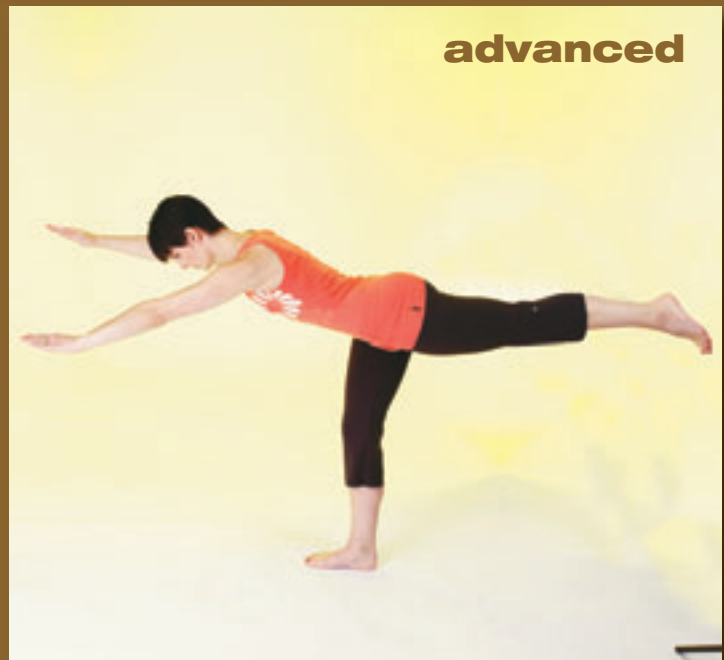
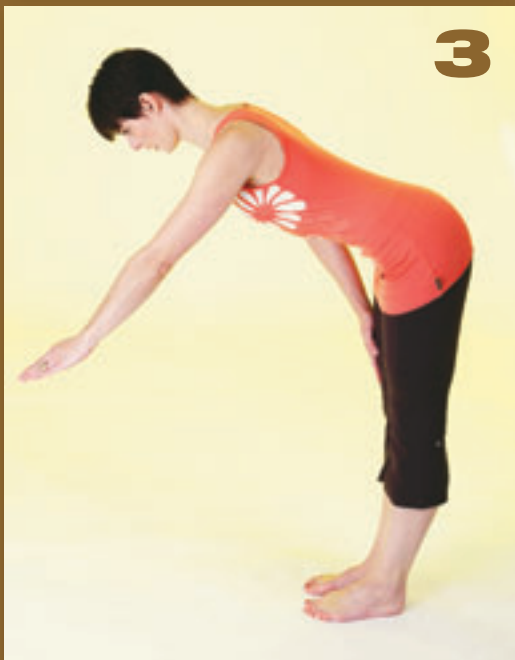
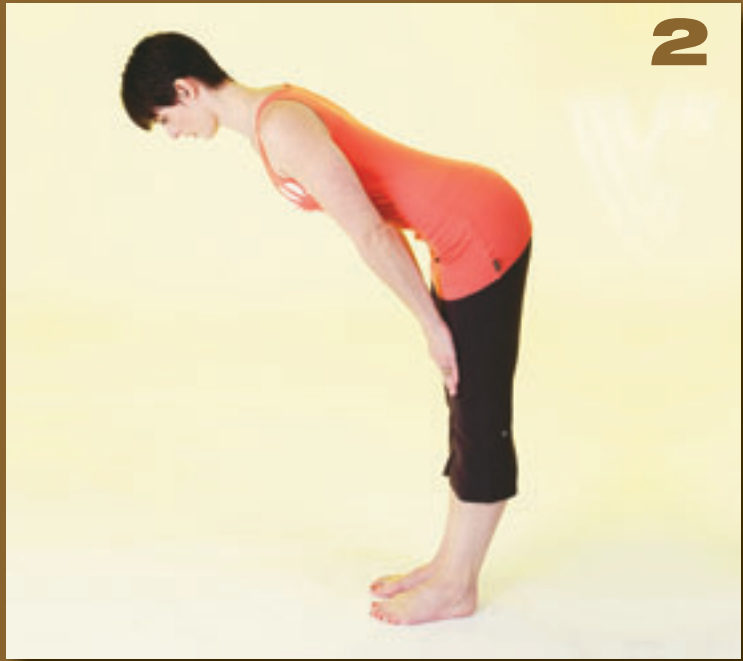
tip: Make sure to keep your abdominals engaged and your knee soft.

modification: touch a surface for balance; keep your hands on your pelvis; do not add knee bend.

advanced: Arms come out like the letter Y as your body is moving parallel to the floor.



4



SWIMMING

purpose: strengthens the shoulder girdle; increases balance

setup: Same as for Rolling Like a Ball.

1. Inhale and engage your pelvic floor and abdominals.
2. Exhale and hinge forward at your hips, sliding your hands down your thighs until just above your kneecaps.
3. Inhale and lift your left arm, keeping it in line with your head.
4. Exhale and bring your left arm back to your

body and alternate the arm raise: As your left arm returns to your thigh, lift your right arm away from your thigh.

5. Inhale and bring your body back to start. Do 2 repetitions.

tips: Keep your core engaged and maintain a neutral spine—keep the hinge movement in the hips.

modification: Slow down the arm movement.

advanced: There are 3 variations: Lift one leg off ground with forward hinge movement; both arms reach overhead; or add overhead arm flutter.