

Core Strength • Stability • Centering • Control • Flexibility Breathing • Concentration • Precision • Flowing Movement

Essential Exercise Introduction

Supine Home Position

Laying on your back, knees bent. Anchor points: feet, sacrum, ribs, shoulders, occiput. All exercises described in this position may also be performed on the foam roller except the hip release.

Breathing in the back and sides of the ribs (strap assisted)
Practice both expanding and narrowing.

Co-contraction (activating the core muscles)

Transverse Abdominus, Pelvic Floor, Lumbar Multifidi are isometrically contracted to create a strong and stable core and dynamic neutral spine. Visualize your center as a sphere. As you contract to muscles in this area, imagine the sphere shrinking in size, a three-dimensional movement. During Pilates exercises you learn to maintain this contraction without holding your breath. Layering of the obliques and rectus abdominus occurs with exercises and is deepened with practice.

Pelvic bowl / sacral mobility / neutral spine

Think of your sacrum (the triangular bone at the base of your spine) as a bowl full of liquid. Exhaling, begin to tilt the bowl so that its contents begin to spill northwards toward your navel/ chin. This position will naturally flatten the lumbar/ low back into the floor. Inhaling, moving through neutral spine and then again exhaling begin to tilt your sacrum(bowl) southwards towards your tailbone/ toes. Your lumbar area will naturally create a deeper arch. Remember always to reach for greater length!

Spinal bridge (articulating)

Inhale back and sides of the ribs, Exhale to engage the core and initiate an articulating bridge by first moving into a northwards pelvic tilt, flattening the low back and lengthening as you articulate one vertebrae at a time into a bridge, resting on your mid ribcage anchors and reaching your knees long in the opposite direction. Inhale back and sides of the ribs, Exhale to engage the core and slowly articulate back down focusing on creating mobility and length in the spine.

Skull bowl (neck lengthening)

The cardinal rule is that you must know how to lengthen your neck before you can pick up your head! Initiate the length through the back of your neck, do not work in the front of the throat. There should be about enough space between your chin and chest to fit an apple. As you add rotation to the right and left be certain to lengthen first. Inhale as you are moving throughout neutral, exhale as you move into lengthening as you co-contract your core muscles.

Shrug and reach with tennis balls

Inhaling shrug (elevate your shoulders) and exhaling reach long with your palms (depressing the shoulders) rolling the balls towards your feet, staying engaged with the triceps reaching into the floor. Coordinate with neck lengthening as you are reaching long towards your feet.

Head float: curl and reach with tennis balls

Building on the previous exercise, we move into an artful and effortless lifting of the head with the core muscles. Remember to go for length and articulation as you return your head to the mat.

Ribcage arms / Scapular reaches / scapulohumeral rhythm

Reaching out through the little finger, connecting through the serratus/ lower armpit to the core. Reaching to the ceiling and then pressing the scapulas/ wing bones into the floor. Inhaling through the center of the movements and exhaling as you are reaching the end of your range of motion, deeply engaging the core and connecting from the core to the fingertips. Be aware of your ribcage, don't allow it to flare and focus on keeping it narrowing (this will also protect your lower back).

Knee fold series

Pelvic stability and core control, floating the legs up (allowing the foot to dangle) in a progressive sequence: single leg, double leg, and marching legs. Begin with neutral spine on the floor, progress to performing exercises on the foam roller with the foam roller placed the length of the spine. Be sure to check for ribcage flair when on the foam roller!

Hip Release

Mobility of the hip in the socket, range of motion. The bent knee slowly releases out to the side on a long exhale. The foot then extends to full length (the leg continues to be laterally rotated). The rotate the toes towards the ceiling and slowly drag the heel back to the starting position.

Prone Home Position

Body float: chest/ double leg / full body

Extension exercises. When rolling the shoulders up towards the ceiling initiate the movement from the center of the back, palms towards the ceiling and reaching long towards the feet. Avoid compressing the spine by going for length. Gaze should be towards the floor with the head reaching long. Cue for length as you return to the mat as well.

Sitting

Spinal rotation

Lift through the chest, wing bones (scapulas) wide and low on the back. Arms in goal-post position or forward of the body with palms facing each other. Cue to grow taller and deepened rotation. Avoid flaring of the ribcage.

Roll back

Cue for increased height and lift in the chest before you begin to roll back. Feel the anchor at your sitz bones, arms are extended in front of you with the palms facing each other. Initiate the movement first with a pelvic tilt, the low back will flatten and curl followed by a sequential articulation of the spine as you roll back. At the beginning level we partially roll back and then return to the upright position.

Standing

Balance and stability (leg behind / front / side/ etc.)