



GATEWAY TO BALANCE

Pilates Homework – The Basics

Safety First!

These exercises are aimed at people who have already learnt them during formal Pilates lessons. Please '**listen**' to your body – if any of the exercises cause pain or aggravate an existing symptom, please stop immediately.

Lateral / Thoracic Breathing

Aim

To encourage your lower ribcage to expand wide (to the sides and the back) as you breathe in and close down as you breathe out.

The Exercise

- a) Sit on a chair (or cross legged) or stand with legs hips width apart.
- b) Wrap a band, scarf or towel around your lower ribcage, crossing it over at the front, gently tighten and hold in both hands.
- c) Inhale and focus on letting your ribs expand the band evenly
- d) Exhale and let ribcage contract (you can pull the band gently) and let the breastbone soften – repeat up to 10 times

Watchpoints

- If you feel at all dizzy - stop
- Keep your shoulders wide and stay relaxed.
- Don't hold your breath – take natural easy breaths.

Relaxation Position

Aim

To let your mind & body relax – it is also the starting position for many exercises (with a neutral pelvis)

The Exercise

- a) Lie on a mat, rug or thick carpet with a small pillow under your head
- b) Bend your knees placing your feet hips width apart
- c) Place your hands on your hips or your abdominals
- d) Find a **Neutral Pelvis** position. Imagine your pelvis is a Compass; North is your navel, South is your Pubic Bone and the Hip Bones represent East & West. Now gently tilt your pelvis in both plains to find a position where all of these points are at the same height.
- e) Breathe naturally focussing on:
 - Letting your body lengthen & widen
 - Releasing any tension in your body – including your neck, the back of your ribcage and around the front of your hips
 - Allow your pelvis to become heavy and sink into the mat

Finding Your Core Stabilisers

Aim

To learn how to use the deep stabilising muscles of your lower back and pelvis

The Exercise

- a) Sit on a chair (*try to sit towards the front of the seat*), focus on sitting evenly on both sitz bones.
- b) Imagine your pelvic floor is like a lift in a building; there are 4 floors the highest being positioned above your shoulders – you will be taking this lift up to different floors.
- c) Inhale as you concentrate on lengthening the spine
- d) As you exhale, lift the pelvic floor to the top floor – think of lifting the back of the pelvic floor and then send your Tailbone towards your Pubic Bone (without moving your pelvis)
 - Try to engage the back, middle & front of your pelvic floor – are you engaging evenly on the Left & Right?
 - Notice if your lower abdominal muscles have engaged – it should feel as though you are drawing them “in” i.e. towards your spine)
- e) As you inhale release your pelvic floor back to the ground floor
- f) Repeat the above 3 steps, the aim being to engage your core stabilisers evenly at 25% of their maximum effort (i.e. at the 1st floor of your lift)

Watchpoints

- Do not clench your buttock muscles as you lift the pelvic floor.
- Keep the rest of your body relaxed – check your shoulders and jaw

Stabilising your Pelvis Whilst you move your legs

Aim

To learn how to use the deep stabilising muscles of your lower back and pelvis to help minimise movement in your pelvis whilst you move a leg.

The Exercise

- a) Lie down in the Relaxation Position (see above)
- b) Inhale as you concentrate on lengthening the spine
- c) As you exhale:
 - Gently lift the pelvic floor engage your lower abdominal muscles (see above)
 - Gently press down on your Left foot
 - Slide your Right leg away from you, heel stays on the floor (Leg Slide)
- d) Inhale as you concentrate on lengthening the spine
- e) As you exhale:
 - Gently lift the pelvic floor engage your lower abdominal muscles (see above)
 - Gently press down on your Left foot
 - Slide your Right leg back to the starting position
- f) Repeat using the opposite leg

Watchpoints

- Is it harder to stabilise on one side; if you find this is the case try repeating these exercises on a 2:1 ratio to work the weaker side more.
- Do not clench your buttock muscles as you lift the pelvic floor.
- Keep the rest of your body relaxed – check your shoulders and jaw

To increase Core Stability challenge – refer to Beginners Homework sheet