



STOTT program director Moira Stott uses the Fitness Circle® exerciser to work the pectoralis muscles against resistance while stabilizing the scapulae on the back.

Alison Hope recounts her introduction to Pilates and how it started her on the road to genuine well-being

# Inner Workout

MOVEMENT THROUGH STOTT PILATES

**I**F ANYONE IS IN TOUCH with his or her body it's a dancer, right? Not exactly. Growing up in the dance world surrounded by mirrors, overly critical teachers and obsessively thin friends, I learned to rely on others' opinions for how I felt, looked and moved. During the 'No-pain, No-gain' '80s, I moved from dance to aerobics punishing myself into shape. Thin and toned but injured and burnt out, I questioned my approach. Relying on external sources and escapist exercise to define how I looked and felt didn't seem to be working. Being surrounded by people who were more interested in conquering their bodies than nurturing them didn't help either. The need for change became obvious. I had to start 'working in' instead of 'working out'.



STOTT program director Moira Stott teaches Crispin Redhead the 'Side Twist' on the STOTT Rehab Reformer™. Beth Evans performs 'Lat Presses' while standing on the STOTT Rotational Disks. The versatility and spring resistance of this piece of equipment facilitates more than 100 different exercises.

## Enter STOTT Pilates

Like most people who get turned on to this mind-body method of fitness, I heard about Pilates exercise through a friend. She told me that I'd love the way it would make me look and feel. After years of pursuing the perfect form, the operative word for me was "Feel". She referred me to a STOTT studio in Toronto, where they teach a contemporary approach to Pilates – one which incorporates modern knowledge about the body, such as restoring the neutral curves of the spine instead of flattening them, as is typical in traditional Pilates and other conventional forms of exercise.

What makes this method of exercise different is that it is as much about about process as it is about results. It's about focusing the mind on how your body moves, developing a strong and stable torso, then building upon this foundation to rebalance and realign the rest of your body. What really resonated with me was the idea of working from the inside out instead of working from the outside in. And so I embarked on what has become an important part of my journey towards genuine well-being.

Through a series of one-on-one sessions – each with knowledgeable, patient and inspiring instructors – I was introduced to a variety of exercises I'd never seen before:

some performed on a mat, others on specially designed resistance equipment. All of them incorporated proper alignment and movement quality, and all were dance-like in their fluidity.

At my first session, my instructor placed me in a gentle, reclining, half-moon-shaped device called a Spine Corrector and said, "Round your body over, relax your arms over the bars, close your eyes and just breathe deeply, into your back."

As I learned the basics, a routine was customized to accommodate my needs and abilities. For example, I have relatively strong abdominal muscles but my right knee has taken a beating over the years, so my routine was designed to challenge my strengths and strengthen my weaknesses, while maintaining proper breathing and posture.

## The exercises

There are hundreds of possible exercises and variations used to customize a routine. Like yoga, all of them have names; for example 'Rolling Like a Ball' (to strengthen the deep abdominal muscles) and the 'Swan Dive' (to strengthen the muscles of the back). But unlike yoga, the exercises aren't static. They involve three-dimensional dynamic movement, which has the added benefit of improving circulation, range of motion and coordination.

The exercises can be as simple (in principle only) as an 'Ab Prep', where you lie on your back and exhale as you curl up gradually reaching for your feet, or the 'Short Spine', which requires you to balance on a bed-like platform called a Reformer while extending your legs, suspended against resistance by a rope and pulley system, up to the ceiling and then back down.

What I like most about the process is how integrated each exercise is with the deep muscles and structure of the torso. People talk about centering in movement all the time. But it wasn't until I applied the principle of a neutral pelvis and spine (neither tucked under, nor arched back) that I was able to feel truly aligned and connected, from head to toe.

The biggest challenge for me has been shedding the auto-pilot mind-set of exercise-as-escape and embracing the notion of



**What meditation is to the soul,  
Pilates is to the body.**

STOTT-certified instructor, Crispin Redhead demonstrates the 'Reverse Pull-up' on the STOTT Trapeze Table / Cadillac. This exercise strengthens arm biceps and deltoids while challenging stability of the torso in a neutral pelvic position.

exercise-as-experience, learning to concentrate on performing each movement properly rather than mindlessly following an instructor. Contrary to what I initially imagined, the approach actually leaves you feeling mentally and physically revitalized rather than drained.

## The benefits

While I feel I've only just scratched the surface of this work, I now know why it's being pursued by everyone from Hollywood celebrities and fitness enthusiasts to rehab patients and elite athletes. Simply put, it feels great to do. Or, as my friend puts it, "It combines the best of western and eastern thinking about the body." What meditation is to the soul, STOTT Pilates is to the body.

As for results, the list is long. But for me, the most significant has been a combination of increased body awareness and virtual elimination of self-criticism. Having accomplished this, all of the other meaningful results seem pretty much like gravy.

Here are just some of the benefits:

- Builds core abdominal and back strength
- Flattens abdominals and restores natural posture
- Develops strength, flexibility and endurance
- Tones and elongates without adding bulk
- Enhances mobility and agility
- Improves balance and function
- Heightens athletic performance
- Alleviates pain and tension

While there's no promise of spiritual healing, from my experience, simply learning to feel tends to free up energy for other more worthy pursuits.

For more information about STOTT Pilates videos, training & certification or equipment call toll-free: N.America 1-800-910-0001 UK 0800-328-5676 or call +416-482-4050, fax +416-482-2742, e-mail them at [info@stottpilates.com](mailto:info@stottpilates.com), or visit their website at [www.stottpilates.com](http://www.stottpilates.com)