

PILATES FOLLOWING BREAST CANCER TREATMENTS PROVIDES PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL RELIEF

By Rachel Stephenson

Recovering from any kind of trauma has both physical and emotional consequences. This article highlights how Pilates can be used to assist in the physical recovery following surgery as well as bringing about a general sense of wellbeing through the Pilates principles.

Pilates is considered to be an *'exercise technique that can help both mind and body recover and rehabilitate slowly.'* Naomi Anderson 20.11.11

The main principles of Pilates that bring about a mind/body connection are Centre, Concentration, Breathe and Flow. It is through these principles, that we can integrate a physical, a psychological and a spiritual form of rehabilitation needed for enhanced patient care.

"Return to Life through Control" Joseph Pilates.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF BREAST CANCER TREATMENT?

As a Pilates teacher working with someone following breast cancer surgery, it is important to consider the type of treatment someone has undergone, and the effects that this will have on their body, both physically and emotionally.

The psychological effects of breast cancer treatment may include grief, fear and uncertainty, shock, stress, anger, resentment, depression as well as a reduced confidence in physical appearance. Treatment can leave patients feeling alien in their own body and this in turn feeds a cycle of lethargy.

"Breast cancer leaves many women feeling disconnected from their bodies and wary of exercise. Pilates offers a gentle method to venture back towards physicality and emotional health." Naomi Aaronson, MA, ORT/L CHT 20.11.11

The physical effects of surgery can damage surrounding tissue and leave the muscles weakened, causing musculoskeletal imbalance and pain, a loss of function and a limited range of motion. Any damage is compounded by extended periods of inactivity during recovery.

HOW PILATES CAN HELP

The physical benefits of Pilates include strengthening damaged tissue and stabilizing the muscles around the effected area, with a focus on stretching and release to target musculoskeletal pain caused by muscle imbalance and a misaligned posture (often a result of physical and emotional stress.)

Following surgery it is important to stretch and mobilize the arm and shoulder area as soon as possible, working through the scar tissue and regaining correct function and range of movement. Stretches should be held for at least 10 seconds and repeated 3 times a day, every day, focusing on stretching into the tight spots (providing there is no pain) and using the breath to breathe into, and release tension from the tight area.

Pilates uses small movements and gentle stretching exercises that can help to relieve a build up of tension in the muscle tissue and surrounding fascia, taking pressure out of the compressed nerves and helping with impingement problems.

Muscle balance and alignment are brought into focus through Pilates. Each exercise emphasises correct placement of joints while movements are executed with precision and control, working towards restoring an optimal functionality and correct movement patterns.

Post-surgery exercise programmes should begin with building up the exercises set by the hospital/practitioner and continue to improve mobility to work through the tightened scar tissue.

The physical recovery from any illness is only the first step towards recovery, rehabilitating the mind and the spirit is a far more complex task, something that is not adequately offered through standard healthcare provision.

Pilates can help to feel centred and is often considered as being the gateway to the mind and the heart. It can be used as a tool for building self-confidence, combating fatigue and overcoming a fear of moving following surgery. It offers support, an enhanced sense of wellbeing and a renewed connection with the body. All these benefits come at an essential time, when the emotional bank account is running low.

Pilates is often considered as *"Physically bringing the focus to the centre of the body,"* Marguerite Ogle. About.com Pilates 20.11.11.

Concentration and focus within the routine exercise patterns are used to connect the mind and body and to isolate and identify specific muscle contractions. By focusing on activating and connecting with the deep stabilising muscles in Pilates, we can help to reconnect with a body that may previously seemed detached following surgery.

The emotional benefits of Pilates are further integrated through the use of breath to combat feelings of stress and anxiety following diagnosis or surgery. Stress, anxiety and panic attacks can be brought on by shallow apical chest breathing, there is ... *'a rapid sharp inhalation followed immediately by an exhalation will cause a drop in carbon dioxide....and is associated with anxiety/panic attacks'* **Georgie Ferraro. Pilates matwork**

The type of breathing used in Pilates is a deep diaphragmatic lateral breath with a focus on maintaining abdominal contraction while breathing down into the pelvic bowl and expanding the breath into the back and sides of the ribcage.

Each exercise in Pilates has a specific breathing pattern that further assists with the coordination and pace of each movement. It helps to focus and connect with the mind and the deep stabilising muscles, and aids in the release of physical and emotional tension. *'Breathing effects our sleep, emotions, energy levels, performance and our ability to relax and handle stress. It influences our mind, body and spirit'* **Georgie Ferraro. Pilates matwork teacher training 2011**

The use of exhalation is also important in Pilates and it is another means of reducing stress, anxiety and a build up of tension. In Pilates, exhalation is used to assist in stretching and release, getting rid of toxins and waste products such as carbon Dioxide and lactic acid that cause tension in the body.

FLOW & LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

The movement, flow and diaphragmatic breath used in Pilates exercises can assist in lymphatic drainage by stimulating and massaging the muscles, and moving the lymphatic fluid around the body.

Deep diaphragmatic breathing is a type of breathing exercise that promotes more effective aeration of the lungs, consisting of moving the diaphragm (a dome shaped muscle that sits below the lungs) downward during inhalation and upward with exhalation. The diaphragm is the main muscle that pumps the lymphatic system and so deep diaphragmatic breathing helps to change pressure within the thoracic duct and assists in draining waste fluids from the body. It relaxes the muscles, massages the internal organs, and allows more oxygen to flow through the body.

“Use of the deep stabilizer muscles, including the transverse rectus abdominis and multifidus, encourages pumping to the thoracic duct, the main area for lymphatic return. This in effect clears the trunk for fluid from the axillary region and pectoralis area where lymph flow may be impaired.” Naomi Anderson 20.11.11

Exercises are slow and controlled, they help to massage the muscles to move lymph fluid around the body and create feelings of being calm and centred through flowing, fluid movements. Visual teaching cues are often used in Pilates and these are often described with reference to waves and water. By using these visual references to water, Pilates helps to create a flow in the exercises which in turn helps to connect and calm the mind.

CHEMOTHEAPY AND FATIGUE

Chemotherapy or radiotherapy affects the levels of oestrogen in the body and can result in a reduced bone density (Osteopenia/Osteoporosis) as well as reduced immune system and fatigue. Following surgery, stress, sensitivity, soreness musculoskeletal pain and a general poor posture contributes to inefficient breathing patterns, resulting in fatigue. To overcome extreme fatigue it is essential to breathe correctly, increasing oxygen intake to fuel and energise both the body and the mind. *“One of the best things about exercise is that it can be relaxing and energizing at the same time. Women in recovery are often fighting stress and fatigue.” Naomi Anderson 20.11.11*

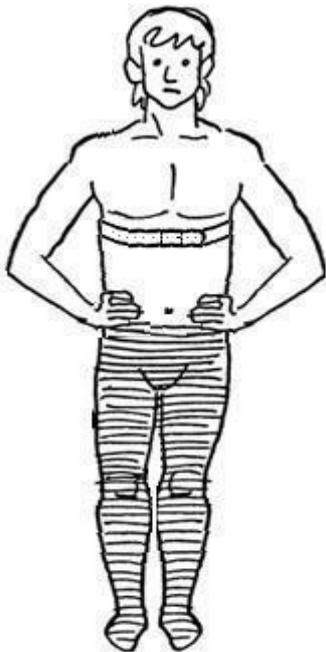
EXERCISES

Lateral Breathing – Week 1

This should be practised as soon as possible following surgery & can be done lying or standing or sitting on a chair.

Start either lying down (knees bent, feet flat on the floor) or standing with feet hip width apart.

An option is to wrap a physio band around the lower part of the ribs and hold in one hand (for feedback), alternatively place hands on either side of the upper waist, mimicking the ribs. Inhale and let the breath travel down your spine and expand into your back and sides so you feel the band expands with your breath. Exhale to release and repeat.



www.NormalBreathing.com

Shoulder Shrugs - Week 1

This exercise helps to mobilise the shoulders and build confidence in movement straight after surgery.

Start with small movements, shrugging the shoulders up to the ears and gliding them back down. There should be a focus on shoulder placement when doing these exercises and thinking of the scapula (shoulder blades) gliding down into the jeans back pockets.

Arm Raises - Week 1

This exercise helps with shoulder placement mobilising both the shoulders and chest. It can be done standing or lying down. Using a stick-like object or a rubber physio band is optional.

Again thinking of the shoulder blades gliding down the back, keeping the shoulder blades connected, raise the arms up in-front of the body as high as possible with a deep inhalation through the nose, palm facing down. Exhale to lower back down.



Shoulder Rolls - Week 1

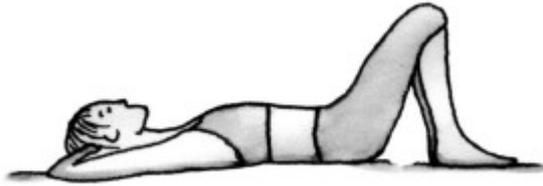
This exercise helps increase the movement in the chest and shoulder.

Place the hands on the shoulders. Exhale to bring the elbows up in-front of you to about 90 degrees. Inhale to lower back down. After a few weeks this movement can be developed by taking the hands away from the shoulders and lengthening the arms out, trying to draw full circles with the arms.

Wings - After 2 weeks

This exercise helps increase the movement in the chest and shoulder. It may take many weeks of regular exercise before the elbows will get close to the bed or floor.

Either standing or lying down interlace the hands behind the head. Think about shoulder blades gliding down the back. Inhale to open the elbows out to the side, trying to keep the ribs from flaring out. Hold for 10 seconds. Exhale to bring them back together and repeat.



Spiders up the Wall - After 2 Weeks

This exercise helps increase the mobility in your shoulder

Standing against the wall, place both palms flat and walk the fingers up the wall as high as possible. Hold for 10 seconds. Walk the hands back down.



Pelvic Rocks

This exercise releases lower back tension, builds pelvic stability and abdominal support to assist posture. This exercise can be done, post surgery, as a prep for many of the Pilates exercises that involve a sequential spinal movement of the lower back.

Start by either standing with feet hip width apart or lying down, knees bent, feet apart (Imagine a tennis ball space between the knees.). Tilt the tailbone forwards and backwards, using an inhalation and an exhalation for each movement.

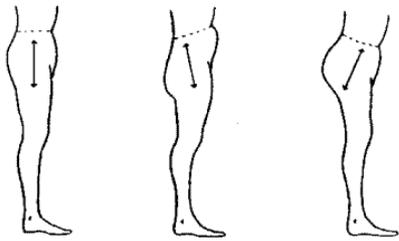
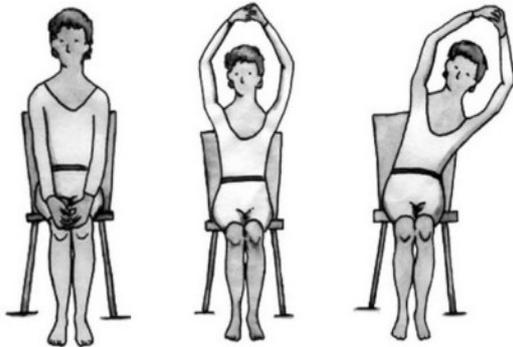


Fig. 1



Lateral Breathing - Once you are strong enough and have full range of movement in the shoulders you can include a side bend with the lateral breath.

Keeping the abdominal engaged. Breathe in to lengthen up to the ceiling. Breathe out to extend to the side. Hold this here as you breathe in to the side of the ribcage (on the expanded side.) Breathe out to come back to centre. Repeat on the opposite side.



Resistance training with Physio bands

Physio bands can be incorporated into a Pilates programme. This will help to strengthen bones.

Place the band behind your waist holding either end in each hand, palms facing up. Elbows tucked in to the waist. Breathe in and externally rotate the hands away from the body, keeping the palms facing up. Breathe out to bring the hands back to centre.

