



Using Pilates to help with Osteoporosis

In Australia Osteoporosis affects 1 in 2 women and 1 in 3 men over the age of 60. Osteoporosis literally means porous bones and is a condition in which the bones become fragile and brittle, leading to a higher risk of fractures (breaks or cracks) than in normal bone.

Osteoporosis occurs when bones lose minerals, such as calcium, more quickly than the body can replace them, leading to a loss of bone thickness (bone mass or density). As a result, bones become thinner and less dense, so that even a minor bump or accident can cause serious fractures. These are known as fragility or minimal trauma fractures.

Any bone can be affected by osteoporosis, but the most common sites are bones in the hip, spine, wrist, ribs, pelvis and upper arm. Osteoporosis usually has no signs or symptoms until a fracture happens - this is why osteoporosis is often called the 'silent disease'.

Fractures due to osteoporosis (osteoporotic fractures) can lead to changes in posture (eg developing a stoop or Dowager's hump in your back), muscle weakness, loss of height and bone deformity of the spine. Fractures can lead to chronic pain, disability, loss of independence and even premature death.

Regular physical activity on a long-term basis has a particularly important role in maintaining healthy bones. Exercise can maintain and increase bone strength by increasing bone mass or by slowing age-related bone loss. Muscle strength is also increased, which is important for supporting the joints and preventing falls.

Pilates provides:

- **Posture Improvement:** One emphasis within Pilates is the alignment of the body - elongating the spine and aligning it with the pelvis, hips, legs, feet, shoulders and head -to help relieve slouching and spinal decompression; also working to strengthen the muscles along the entire spine to help promote and maintain good posture.
- **Overall body strengthening:** especially the abdominals which help stabilize the spine, pelvis and then the rest of the body; when these are strong and can support the body there is less effort to maintain an upright position; keeping the leg and arm bones strong.
- **Maintaining joint flexibility and mobility:** constantly strengthening the muscles around the joints e.g. especially the hip where the most common injuries occur due to falls; which then allows for better mobility and flexibility.
- **Appropriate Weight bearing exercises:** During Pilates exercises you will use not only gravity and your own body weight but resistance bands, springs and sometimes free weights appropriate for your individual needs and progress.
- **Improving balance and co-ordination:** Pilates will help increase your co-ordination, balance, posture and reflexes helping you to avoid falling. If you do fall you may well be able to catch yourself in time and prevent a bone fracture; balance and control play a large role in Pilates exercises giving you more confidence in everyday activities.

A Pilates session involves working on all the major muscles group of the body independently to strengthen and to stretch, and then help integrate the whole body together to allow for free flowing, unconstricted movement for everyday life. Pilates is a whole-body experience and promotes symmetry of the musculature along with proper body mechanics; Pilates promotes a feeling of well-being and a sense of achievement. It builds more confidence to be able to return to a more active life.

Please note that not all Pilates exercises are suitable for people with osteoporosis and that Pilates instructors are sensitive to each individual and are able to modify an exercise to a level that is appropriate.

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