

A side-by-side comparison of Pilates and yoga

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Yoga

Origin: Founded thousands of years ago in India and brought to the western world more than 100 years ago; a life philosophy that incorporates values coupled with a series of static poses held over a period of time.

Intent: Primarily designed to stimulate muscles while connecting the mind, body and spirit.

The exercise: Yoga exercises are static and held for a particular period of time; the holding promotes stimulation of muscles. It tends to work every muscle of the body, emphasizing flexibility over strength. Yoga combines poses with breathing, posture, relaxation and meditation with the intent of creating a harmonious body, mind and spirit.

Forms: Numerous forms are practiced throughout the world.

Poses/positions: Thousands.

Breathing: Deep breathing primarily in and out the nose while holding each pose and transitioning from one to another; various styles of breathing such as for relaxation, focus or meditation.

Degree of difficulty: Slight learning curve; yoga requires some level of strength in some muscles and some flexibility to perform movements.

Average cost: \$15 per hour-long group session

Finding a class: Ask to observe a class before participating or enrolling. Most teachers and studios offer drop-in classes and some may allow you to attend a trial class, perhaps at a reduced rate. Health clubs often include classes in their membership fees so you can try yoga in a familiar setting. It's a good idea to spend some time trying different styles, different teachers and different studios to determine where you feel most comfortable.

Benefits:

- Increases strength and flexibility
- Improves balance
- Strengthens immune system
- Improves circulation
- Strengthens and tones muscles
- Improves concentration and focus
- Reduces stress and anxiety

Source: Yoga Alliance

The Pilates Method

Origin: Developed in 1920s by Joseph Pilates as a series of exercises to help soldiers recover from battle injuries, then introduced to dancers.

Focus: Designed to improve the strength of core stabilizer muscles. Pilates emphasizes toning, flexibility, balance, timing and resistance training for muscular strength.

The exercise: Pilates uses movements, five to 10 repetitions, which emphasize the dynamic flow of movement from one exercise to the next.

Forms: Mat-based and equipment-based (spring and pulley system with removable carriage).

Degree of difficulty: Can be performed by a complete novice, but some previous activity is helpful.

Movements: More than 500.

Breathing: Rib cage breathing, deep breaths through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, for deep cleansing of the lungs and meditation.

Cost: \$40-\$100 per one-hour private session; duets and trios range from \$25-\$50 a person; group mat classes \$10-\$25 per person.

Finding a class: Make sure the studio has all of the equipment and is certified by a recognized organization such as New York Pilates Studio®, Power Pilates and The Physical Mind Institute. Instructor should have a minimum of 600 hours of training.

Benefits:

- Helps prevent injuries by correcting and improving balance
- Improves timing and coordination
- Hastens recovery from preexisting injuries
- Improves alignment and posture
- Enhances breathing and circulation (cardiovascular stamina)
- Increases strength and flexibility
- Improves muscle tone, energy and mental concentration

Source: United States Pilates Association