

# live well

## a user's guide to... pilates

Read the press clippings on Madonna, Jodie Foster and Courteney Cox Arquette raving about the Pilates Method, and you'd swear they'd discovered it. But this exercise technique has been a well-kept secret of the body-conscious for decades.

Pilates (pronounced *pi-lah-teez*) aims to balance and condition the body by lengthening and strengthening muscles. It was developed in the 1920s by German-born Joseph Pilates who, after a sickly childhood, was determined to strengthen and rehabilitate his body. He became proficient in yoga, dance, boxing, gymnastics and skiing, but set upon developing his own form of strength training. In 1926, Joseph immigrated to the US and opened an exercise studio in New York, where his methods gained popularity within the dance community.

Pilates comprises about 500 slow, controlled no-impact to low-impact movements, with emphasis on concentration and controlled breathing, and establishing a mind-body connection. It works the deep muscles in the abdomen and back to improve flexibility, strength, balance and posture.

"These deep muscles make up the core or 'powerhouse' of the body," explains Pilates practitioner Sally Anderson (below). "By strengthening them, we create a balanced support system and ideal postural alignment."

The exercises are performed either on a floor mat or using specially designed machines, which are fitted with springs, belts, pulleys and cables. As there is no lifting of weights and repetitions are limited, you don't bulk up your muscles but instead strengthen them by working against resistance – without putting stress on your joints or bones.

Pilates is a particularly good fitness technique to adopt when recovering from an injury, and it is gaining increased recognition from doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors and physiotherapists for its rehabilitative powers. ● **— cate wall**

*Pilates costs \$60-\$85 for an initial consultation, then \$25-\$35 for a studio session with machines, and \$12-\$20 for a mat session. Classes run for 1-1½ hours and should be supervised by qualified instructors, with no more than four in a group. For more information, contact the Australian Pilates Method Association, tel (03) 9529 6144.*

