

Back Pain



Check your posture right now, are your shoulders rounded, do you feel stress in your neck, is your tummy slumping, is your low back tired or achy? If you answered "yes" to any one of these questions or more, you are not alone.

According to Stats Canada, four out of five Canadians will experience back pain in their lives. Although some back pain is as a result of a direct injury to the neck such as whiplash, or to the low back through lifting injuries, 85 to 90 percent of individuals experiencing back pain have had no identifiable cause. Often low back pain is reported as, *"just being there, a dull ache in the small of the back, nothing precipitates it, some days are worse than others but it's always there"*. These described types of low back pain are usually a result of a weakened posture of the soft tissue supporting the spine; muscles, ligaments and connective tissue. The weakened tissues over time, cause changes in the spinal posture including the pelvis and shoulder blades. In turn, this causes the core of the body to cave inwards putting excessive stress on the muscles and ligaments of the back as well as the spinal vertebra and discs. Because most of the movement of the spine occurs at the neck and low back, these are the areas that receive the most stress and cry out for help.

One of most common types of treatment for this type of back pain is rehabilitative exercise therapy. Often the exercises given for low back pain are designed to build the strength in the abdominal muscles. Although these exercises may be beneficial, there is another piece of the muscular puzzle that needs to come together to really strengthen, support and stabilize the spine.

This piece is found in the deep core muscles of the body, both in the front and the back of the spine. These include the pelvic floor muscles as well as the deep abdominals and deep spinal muscles. One extremely effective fitness program that directs exercises right to this area is *"Pilates."*

Pilates was founded by Joseph Pilate in the early 1900's. His early work was designed as rehabilitation exercises for World War One soldiers recovering from injuries. His later work influenced many professional dancers and the first Pilates Studio was opened in New York City in 1923. Joseph Pilate believed that using movement consciously, smoothly and with precision rather than reflexively, the movement would allow a connection between the mind and the body. He felt that this increased awareness in concentration and muscular engagement would lead to improved posture, stamina and graceful movements.

The basis for the Pilates fitness program is strengthening the core muscles and emphasizing the breath. Joseph Pilate had originally designed his program for rehabilitation, so exercises are safe and in fact, recommended by physiotherapists, kinesiologists and doctors for restoring chronic back pain. It is also a fitness program that can be extremely beneficial in maintaining flexibility and strength at any age or stage in life as the exercises are designed to increase mobility and strength to the tissues that support the spine.

If you are in this 85 to 90 percent of individuals experiencing chronic back pain; neck, mid back or low back, Pilates may offer you some strength, support and stability resulting in a decrease of pain.