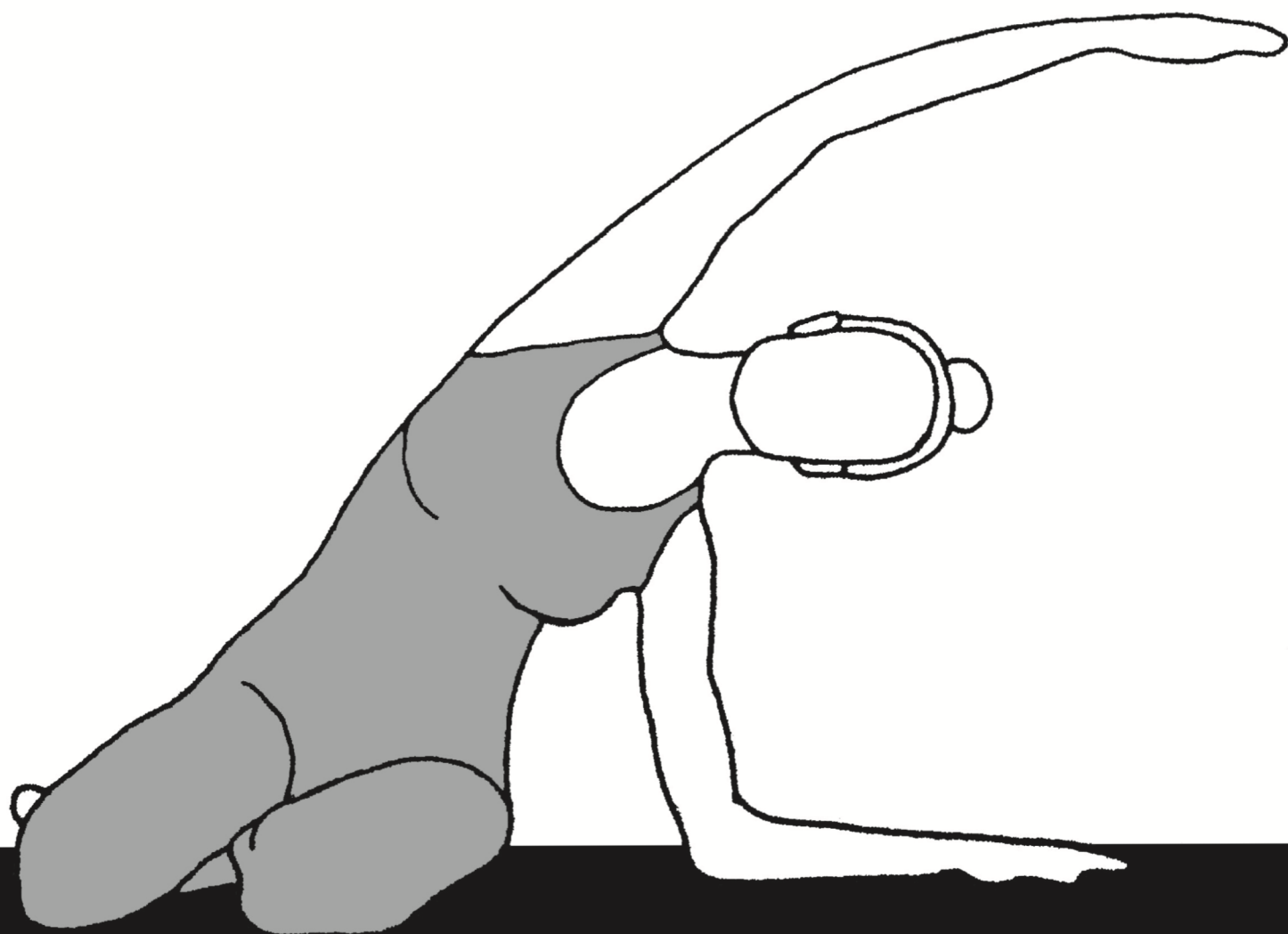


Pilates and Parkinson's

Sarah Sessa and Karen Pearce



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Foreword

By Alan Herdman

Sarah Sessa and Karen Pearce have produced a book *Pilates and Parkinson's* that should be in every Pilates's instructors bag or on their bedside table. Parkinson's is introduced in a way that is clear and concise. The reader is guided through Parkinson's allowing them to understand all the aspects of the condition. The explanation of how Parkinson's affects movement and function is particularly important to Pilates instructors. Every Pilates instructor will know the background and principles of the Pilate's technique. I would recommend that they read this section and re-visit these principles, which will help them to understand the exercises that are not strictly the Pilates exercises that they know from their training.

The exercise routines in part two are excellent. Although a programme using the mat and apparatus is recommended, the instructor who is only mat trained will find the mat exercises extremely beneficial to clients with Parkinson's. Having used these exercises in my studios for many years I can guarantee that they work. I have read this excellent book as a Pilates teacher and educator and I know that it is an important addition to the teachers library. It is equally important as a companion to the client with Parkinson's as background information about their condition and as a useful homework book.

Introduction

Although I am far from happy with the diagnosis, I now feel I am doing something to help myself Ray, 2011.

The Purpose of This Book

We decided to write this book to provide a useful guide to two groups of people. Firstly, for those diagnosed with Parkinson's who are looking for a safe form of exercise that could work for them. There are lots of Pilates books out there, but none specifically related to Parkinson's that provide exercises specific and appropriate to this condition. Over the past few years we have seen a number of clients coming through our studio doors with Parkinson's who have felt the enormous benefits of Pilates. They tell us how their increased flexibility and strength as well as their improved balance and walking have helped them to remain independent. Secondly, we hope this book will also be enjoyed by Pilates instructors who are wondering how they can best help a client who comes in with a diagnosis of Parkinson's.

There are few, if any scientific trials that investigate the use of Pilates in the management of Parkinson's. We have therefore used information that we sourced when writing up a recent case study, together with our physiotherapy knowledge and the experiences that we have had with our clients in our day-to-day clinical practice to inform the basis of the exercises and advice in this book.

Being diagnosed with a progressive condition is difficult to say the least; a person may feel shock and sadness, a loss of control, or that their life is entirely in the hands of the doctors and medication. Many people enter a period of denial, and may require support to help come to terms with the diagnosis. One client said:

I am told by friends that I became very detached and quiet for three months after being diagnosed. Prior to my diagnosis I had arranged to do the GR20, a twelve day hike along the length of the mountains of

Corsica. It was doing this that helped me out of my depression and made me realise that there was life after Parkinson's.

Finding an exercise regime that could work by reducing symptoms such as weakness, poor movement, muscle rigidity, stiffness and poor balance, can allow you to feel more in control. It is something YOU can do to help manage the condition. We believe this approach not only provides physical benefits, but also a greater sense of wellbeing and relaxation.

In this book we offer the reader an overview of physiotherapy, exercise and Pilates in relation to Parkinson's followed by clear exercise programmes that can either be made part of your daily routine or compliment your Pilates class if you already attend one. There is a chapter describing exercises using small equipment and another chapter on the Pilates machines for those attending a studio with such apparatus. The programmes described are not exhaustive, as there are a large number of exercises in the Pilates repertoire that might be suitable for you. We explain the reasons why certain specific movements and exercises are especially good for Parkinson's to help you to understand better, and choose from these and other resources.

Once you start Pilates you will quickly catch the Pilates bug and miss it when you don't do it. You will find yourself carrying out these exercises whilst waiting for a bus or making a cup of tea, and it will become a way of life for you. To begin with you might find Pilates very gentle, but you will be surprised how a seemingly innocent looking exercise is actually quite a challenge. If you are consistent with exercising, before you know it your core will be stronger and your flexibility so improved that you might become more flexible than you have ever been before. Furthermore, because there is always another Pilates exercise to learn you will never be bored!

More than anything we hope this book will be a useful tool to help you along your journey towards a fitter, healthier lifestyle; a guide to let you know you *can* do something to help manage the physical symptoms of the Parkinson's.

Balance of Body: The Pilates Method – *A Balance of Body and Mind*

Joseph Pilates was born in 1883 in Germany: he was a sickly child and grew up determined to improve his physical ability. He came to England just before the First World War as a circus performer. When war broke out, because of his nationality he was interned at a hospital where he was

required to offer rehabilitation to war veterans. His famous Universal Reformer machine was originally invented by attaching springs to hospital beds to allow those confined to bed to exercise. After the war, Pilates returned to Germany, and soon after that moved to New York where he devised an exercise regime called Contrology.¹ He developed this regime from watching animals stretch, from practicing self-defence, acrobatics, boxing, and eventually from working with some of the leading ballet dancers of the time. Contrology was based on the principles of muscle balance, core strength and agility – an exercise system that required thought too. Joseph Pilates felt strongly that his exercise was to be used in everyday life – as a way of life!

The Pilates that is practiced today has the advantage of being used and improved by physiotherapists and other health and exercise professionals; as we gain greater knowledge of the human body these techniques are improved. We talk about the Principles of Pilates but it must be noted that they were not directly developed by Pilates himself but by instructors and the Pilates community. For this reason they may differ slightly depending on your source of information. However the concept and message remain the same – *A Balance of Body and Mind*.

The Six Principles

Breath

A good breathing pattern will stop your breath becoming tense and shallow, which can cause even simple things such as climbing stairs to feel difficult. Learning to control your breathing will allow movements to become more natural and relaxed.

With Pilates exercises we mainly use a lateral breathing technique, which is a breath into the sides of the ribcage as opposed to expanding the abdomen (or pushing out the tummy). This mirrors our natural way of breathing and enables the deep abdominal muscles to be engaged on both inhalation and exhalation, which helps to stabilise the pelvic girdle and strengthen the core muscles

Concentration

Having to isolate certain muscles also focuses the mind. Thinking about the breathing pattern, the muscles being activated and the correct alignment of the body will improve concentration. As you become more proficient at

the exercises you will begin to realise how the mind can control our movements – it's just a matter of connecting mind to body.

Centre

Strength comes from a central point of your body, which is often called your *core*. To feel that your body is centred means that the muscles are balanced and the core muscles are strong. This allows you to maintain a correct posture and undertake everyday activities without causing injury to vulnerable places such as the spine. For people with Parkinson's, this would particularly help your lower back area, which is prone to stiffness, weakness and then pain.

Practicing Pilates will improve the way that you stand and eliminate the muscular pain caused by bad posture. As your central core muscles become stronger, the exercises should also help preserve your balance responses.

Control

When practicing the Pilates exercises regularly you will gradually improve to achieve the desired amount of control. The muscles should work in better harmony so that the stronger ones don't dominate, and you will start to feel in control of your movements. For many people, the programme of exercises will feel more natural and require less of a conscious effort over time. For some people with Parkinson's however, you may need to be taught ways to remember to control your movement.

Precision

Pilates exercises consist mainly of small and very subtle movements; precision is more important than repetition. We can get into bad postural habits and allow some muscles to become over strong and tight, and others weak and underused.

Acquiring an understanding of which muscles should be working and isolating these muscles will correct these issues. Although it may seem difficult at first, the ability to isolate muscles improves with practise and once mastered can be taken into every aspect of daily life.

Flow

As we get older our joints start to stiffen, we have a tendency to move less and so we lose some flexibility. If we keep our joints moving and our

muscles stretched, however, we can continue to stay flexible, maintain an upright posture and retain agility into old age. This is all the more achievable if a Pilates routine is practised regularly and becomes a way of life.