“Pilates is exercise with very specific cues.” These were the first words I heard when learning how to teach Pilates from Christine. As with all of her work, this new chair book follows those words. Unlike many Pilates manuals, Pilates Chair: Challenging the Core provides not only the exercises, but also a clear rationale of why each exercise is done. This manual will be useful for Pilates instructors and for rehab professionals interested in using Pilates exercise as part of a treatment program for their patients.

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The exercises in Pilates Chair: Challenging the Core are presented in a very organized and logical order. As a new teacher, I found this grouping helpful in determining programs for all clients with specific needs. The variations included with each exercise provide safe and effective options for everyone.

Mary Ann Martin
PHI Pilates Trained Pilates Instructor
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With her background as a physical therapist and athletic trainer, Chrissy’s understanding of the human body is vast and always growing. Combine that knowledge with her passion for Pilates, and you can begin to appreciate Chrissy’s unique rehabilitation style that sets her apart from other health care professionals. Her talent is backed by years of experience, which allows her to stand out as an amazing teacher, professional, and mentor.

Lauren Nahas, MPT
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We have been teaching Pilates for 10 years and have used many of Christine Romani-Ruby’s resources. Pilates Chair: Challenging the Core is excellent, very detailed, and easy to follow. We look forward to using these chair exercises with all our clients.

Michael and Dawn Keating
PHI and PMA Certified Pilates Instructors
Owners of Healthy Life Unlimited Pilates Studio
The Woodlands, TX
Pilates Chair: Challenging the Core

Christine Romani-Ruby, PT, MPT, ATC
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About the Author
In his lifetime, Joseph Pilates designed 12 pieces of exercise equipment to be used in his method of Contrology. Each of the 12 apparatus served a purpose in Pilates’ method of Contrology and he presented the wunda chair as a form of home exercise equipment. An original film of Pilates, shared by his student Mary Bowen, introduced his wunda chair to the public.

The film opened with Pilates and his wife Clara in their living room. Clara was sitting on the wunda chair, and Joseph was facing her on the couch. This version of the wunda chair converted into a recliner. The user would turn the wunda chair on its back, lock the pedal, and place cushions on the seat. In this short film, Pilates demonstrated how the chair transformed into a piece of exercise equipment and then performed several of his exercises. It flowed like many of the infomercials of today.

Although the original version of the wunda chair is still available today, many updated versions are available. For example, Ken Endelman of Balanced Body increased the height of the chair and split the pedal into what he calls the combo chair. This chair accommodates the taller clients of today and allows separation of the pedal tension to each side of the body. The combo chair also offers variable tension springs, easy spring attachment, and several safety features to protect the fingers and toes from harm. Another common variation of the chair has been a lighter, more portable version for group classes. These chairs are lower with a wider seat, and they are light for stacking and moving. If you are shopping for a new chair, it is certainly in your best interest to explore all of the versions and consider the chair that best suits your needs.

All Pilates chairs have several features in common. The top of the chair is called the seat, and the front of the chair is the side with the pedal. The area on the front of the chair under the pedal is called the no-step zone. It is important to keep the feet and fingers clear of this area when stepping or pressing into the pedal. The back side of the chair has a mechanism for attaching the springs. This book will use the combo chair, so this area will have what is called a cactus. The cactus has four positions, and they are numbered from bottom to top. When a spring is attached at the bottom position (or number 1), it has a low tension. When it is attached at position 4 (or the top position), it has a high tension. The combo chair has a total of four springs—two light and two heavy. The light ones are colored white and are located on the outside of the pedal. When indicating the tension for an exercise, the text will specify the number of springs. The color and the position can be varied according to body size and strength. When noting a client’s spring tensions in a visit record, write the spring tension as follows: “2 white at position 2.”
Not all chairs have arms, but the combo chair has arms that are removable. These arms are used for several of the standing exercises. They are adjustable and should be positioned to the height of the client’s shoulder when standing next to the chair.
This book will describe and discuss only a small fraction of the hundreds of exercises developed by Joseph Pilates. To the best of my knowledge, I have attempted to maintain the original names of the exercises as provided by Pilates, but I have organized the exercises and workouts using up-to-date research on core exercise. As mentioned in the history of Pilates in Chapter 1 of this book, Joseph Pilates indicated that all movement comes from a stable center, which he called the “powerhouse.” This powerhouse encompassed the rectangular area of the trunk. This theory matches much of the recent research on core strengthening, which indicates that the core functions differently than the limb musculature. The core muscles act through co-contraction to stiffen the powerhouse (torso) during activities of daily living and sport (McGill, 2010; Fenwick 2009; Freeman, 2006; Kavcic 2004). This book incorporates this research in categorizing Pilates’ chair exercises. Modern theories on strengthening the core musculature encourage challenging the spine through creating power at the extremities and limiting the stress to the spine through movements such as flexion. Repeated bending of the spinal discs has been identified as a mechanism for injury (McGill, 2010; Callaghan, 2001), and these movements should be reserved for daily function. The Pilates repertoire offers a wealth of exercises to challenge the powerhouse by creating power at the extremities. The exercises in this book are organized by position of the spine so that you can easily determine which clients should perform each movement and then how to progress client programs and classes.

References


“People won’t understand the brilliance of my work for 50 years,” claimed Joseph Pilates before his death in 1967 (History of Pilates, 2001). Surprisingly, he was right. His exercise method, now called Pilates, is the fastest growing method of mind-body fitness. The American College of Sports Medicine’s (ACSM) annual worldwide survey of health and fitness trends initially recognized Pilates in the top 10 trends impacting the health and fitness industry in 2008. Pilates has since remained strong in the top 10 through 2010 (Thompson, 2009).

People who knew and trained with Pilates over 50 years ago are not surprised by the success of his methods. Mary Bowen, a master teacher who originally trained with Pilates, states that the method is growing because it is effective and because people continue to share in Pilates’ vision (Bowen, 2005). “He had a passion about the body and a genuine desire to teach others,” states Ron Fletcher, another master teacher who originally trained with Joseph and Clara Pilates (Fletcher, 2005). In his lifetime, Pilates designed 12 pieces of exercise equipment, over 500 exercises, and an instructional method that comprise the fitness regime. Pilates had no desire to become famous; he named his method Contrology, not Pilates as it is called today. He was just fanatically driven and infected with an incurable need to produce results.

Pilates continually supported his work with research. He was a scientist, performing some of the first outcome studies by taking photos and films of his clients before and after learning Contrology. Pilates wrote, “I am not a mercenary or a quack. I welcome the opportunity to furnish detailed information,” and he did (Pilates & Miller, 2000). Pilates supported his claims with summative evaluation through photographs (Morrison & Kemp, 2004). He set high standards for himself and his teachers, not to mention the students, and he expected nothing less than perfection. Pilates would use the before and after photographs to evaluate the effectiveness of the exercises within his instructional design. If the students did not gain results, he would find the exercises
or the equipment to be at fault and would redesign them. Pilates used other types of evaluation as well. He listed client symptoms and complaints as well as posture and noted how they changed over time.

Pilates also included instructional strategies in his vision for Contrology. He stated that the exercises needed to be practiced daily to the point of subconscious reaction. Pilates prescribed a specific order for the performance of the exercises, and he had precise instructions for each exercise, including a thorough process for the flow of the breath, the position of each joint, and the cueing to be provided by the instructor. Repetitions were specifically controlled to keep from introducing fatigue. Pilates also incorporated verbal descriptive cues to help the participant visualize what he wanted as well as proprioceptive cues, where he touched areas of the body to assist in successful performance of the exercise (Fletcher, 2005).

“This will be the exercise that people will want and need in the new millennium,” predicted Pilates in his book originally published in 1934 (Pilates & Miller, 2000). Through his writings, it is evident that he knew that his work would not become meaningful for a very long time. Still, he continued to create a sense of urgency for the public to adopt his changes. He worked for long-term change but recognized small changes as steps along the way. A common comment from Pilates to those studying at his gym was, “We have only touched the tip of the iceberg” (Fletcher, 2005). In his book Your Health, Pilates stated, “Time and progress are synonymous terms; nothing can stop either. Truth will prevail. That is why I know my teachings will reach the masses and finally be adopted as universal” (Pilates & Miller, 2000).

Over and over, Pilates would allude to the public’s misunderstanding of physical training as it relates to health and the unnecessary causes of human suffering that would shorten lives. He offered his vision as a method to lead mankind to universal health (Pilates & Miller, 2000). He was what Csikszentmihalyi (2003) would call a “hundred-year manager.” The hundred-year manager has a vision that gives life meaning and offers hope for the future—he cannot merely survive on the desire to make a profit. In his book that shared his vision, Pilates wrote, “I make this appeal to reach those interested in the future welfare of the human race, not for profit” (Pilates & Miller, 2000).

Born near Dusseldorf, Germany in 1880, Joseph was a frail child who was plagued by rickets, asthma, and rheumatic fever. His father was a prize-winning gymnast, and his mother was a naturopath (Bowen, 2005). He had great aspirations to be strong and healthy, and he studied exercise and anatomy even as a young child in an attempt to develop his own body. By the age of 14, he had developed his body so well that he was modeling for anatomy charts, while practicing as a boxer, gymnast, skier, and diver. These accomplishments were the start of Pilates’ confidence in his method of exercise and the development of his vision for mankind.

At the age of 32, Pilates traveled to England to continue his training as a boxer and found employment as a circus performer. Two years later, World War I broke out.
In 1914, Pilates was interned along with other German nationals in a camp for enemy aliens in Lancaster (Linderman, 2003). It was in this camp that he began to design and practice his system of 500 exercises that he would later call Contrology. Pilates taught his exercises to fellow inmates, and when the Spanish influenza came in 1918, his exercise regime was credited with keeping them alive. This flu was an epidemic around the world, taking the lives of millions, more than even the war. Those infected contracted severe pneumonia and died within hours (Billings, 1997). Pilates’ exercises required proper breathing and his well-developed techniques are believed to be what kept the infected inmates alive. News of this exercise that saved the lives of hundreds of men helped to build public confidence in the method that Pilates named Contrology.

Through this event, Pilates shared his vision and professed that Contrology would be a method to prevent disease and death. In 1934, he explains that he wrote his book to allow “those who are interested to read, digest, and know what is wrong with the human race today and how its physical ills can be cured or prevented” (Pilates & Miller, 2000).

Pilates continued to share his vision of Contrology when he was transferred to another camp on the Isle of Man. At this camp, he took a job as a nurse and worked with many of the internees who suffered from wartime diseases. This camp offered the conditions to stimulate the development of the Pilates equipment. In response to the needs of bedridden soldiers, Pilates attached the springs from their beds to the bed frame. These springs allowed the patients to exercise and assisted with daily activities (History of Pilates, 2001). Without these conditions and patients, he may have never developed the equipment to be used with Contrology.

The crafting of the equipment became part of Pilates’ vision. He filed his first patent in Germany in 1924 for the reformer and received it on March 15, 1927 (United States Patent Office, 1927). Today, the reformer is the most widely used piece of Pilates equipment. It offers a unique workout and a method to teach and evaluate the student. Mary Bowen describes the springs as the most unique feature of the equipment. She alludes to how the springs “inform” the body and teach the participant how to move. The springs used with Pilates are educational more than resistive. They provide a method of self-evaluation through direct feedback to the participant. The students can grade their own performance by how the equipment responds to their movement. This feedback within the instruction enhances successful learning (Morrison & Kemp, 2004).

After the war, Pilates returned to Germany, where he was asked to continue to work with the German Army. Disappointed with the political direction of Germany, and lacking the desire to train men to fight, he made the decision to leave the country. Boxing expert Nat Fleischer encouraged him to immigrate to the United States, and Max Schmeling, a world-class boxer from Germany, made it possible. On the ship to the United States, Pilates met his future wife and partner Clara. Clara is described as a “ballast” by Mary Bowen (Bowen, 2005). Joseph had charisma; he was an innovator,