

# 5 Pilates Exercises That Will Strengthen Your Yoga Practice

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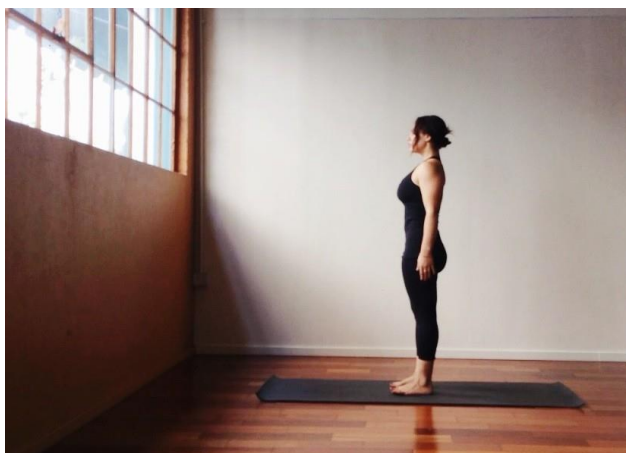
Pilates and yoga [are two very different practices](#) that support each other beautifully. The strength and precision of Pilates balances the freedom of movement of yoga. Learning to move from a solid foundation and with a strong connection to our bodies, will enable us to move through life with greater comfort and ease.

Pilates can help us connect to muscles we've never used before. Often, if a muscle has been unused or underused, the neurological brain pathway to that muscle is also underutilized. Our larger muscles like to do all the work, but Pilates helps us focus on and connect with the smaller, more intrinsic muscles.

It is worth mentioning that all of the exercises on the Pilates apparatus (the reformer, cadillac, wunda chair, etc.) were actually designed to support exercises performed on the mat with proper alignment.

Yoga poses are not static; instead, there is a dynamic quality to the stillness found in asana. These shapes are active, and we move and flow through them so that the *prana* (life force energy) can move and flow freely throughout our bodies.

## Roll Down



The Roll Down is a great way to begin a mat Pilates practice. It gives you a chance to land — physically and mentally — on your feet, to notice your breath, and to really feel into your body.

This exercise focuses on the hamstrings and abdominals, and you want to be sure to articulate through the spine with precision and fluidity, helping you find stability in challenging poses like [Warrior III](#) (Virabhadrasana III).

Begin standing much like you would in Mountain Pose (Tadasana) and feel your feet beneath you and grow long through the length of your spine.

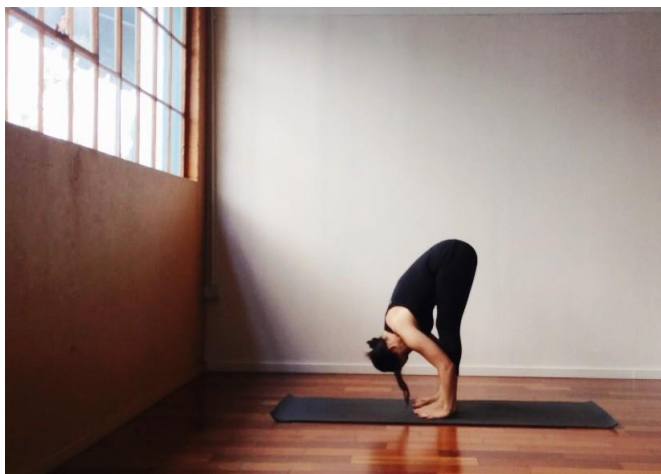


Inhale to prepare.

Exhale and curl your chin into your chest and slowly roll your way down into a forward fold. As you roll down, make sure your hips stay perfectly still and your pelvis does not shift forward or back.

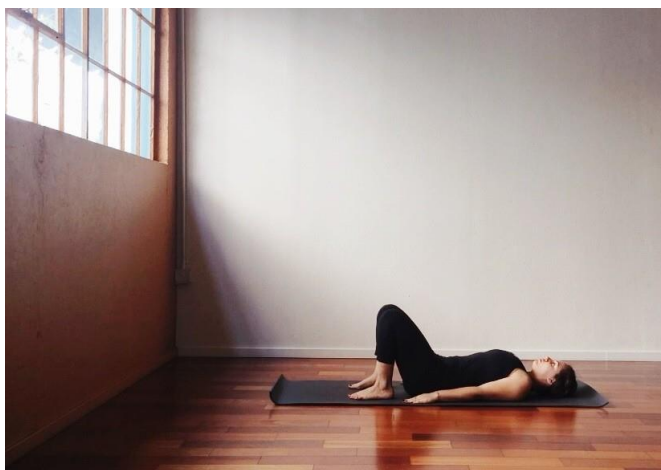
Inhale and shift your weight forward onto your toes and then back into your heels; moving forward and back a few times, shifting your body weight slightly forward into your toes with your heels still grounded. Feel your hips over your ankles.

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Exhale and start scooping in or hollowing your low belly, drawing your belly button in toward your spine as you roll your way back up. Keep your hips drawing slightly forward over your ankles until you return back to a standing position.

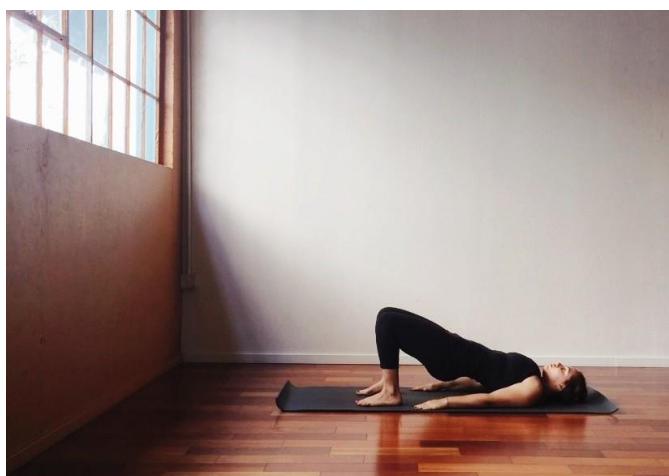
### Pelvic Curl



In the Pelvic Curl, you are also focusing on the hamstrings and abdominals as well as spinal articulation.

Start laying supine, with the soles of your feet on the floor and arms resting alongside your body (palms face down). Keep your knees pointed upward as you draw your heels in closer to your sit bones.

Inhale to prepare, keeping a neutral spine.



Exhale and flex, curling your pubic bone in toward your belly button and pressing down into your heels. Continue to flex your lumbar spine as you roll your hips up and off the mat.

Inhale, holding the lift at the top and making sure your ribs are soft (and not flaring out wide). Engage your hamstrings and think of pressing your heels down and dragging them in closer to your sit bones. Try to keep your glutes relaxed instead of tightly clenched.

Exhale and think of energetically lifting your hips higher as you slowly — one vertebra at a time — roll your way back down onto the mat.

Repeat at least 5 times.

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### Front Support



Front Support teaches you how to find shoulder stability and how to maintain integrity at the shoulder girdle when we are moving our body.

When performing this exercise, the shoulders and spine are unaffected by the leg as it moves up and down in space. Your abdominals are engaged and therefore also working to maintain stabilization.

If you remember these actions when you are practicing fully body poses like [Chaturanga](#) or a handstand, for example, your body will find stabilization through your core as you use your legs.

Start in a plank, with your palms planted into your mat and shoulders stacked over your wrists. Draw in your belly button toward your spine and think about lengthening your tailbone toward your heels.

Inhale to prepare and imagine your sternum/breastbone reaching forward.

Start in a plank, with your palms planted into your



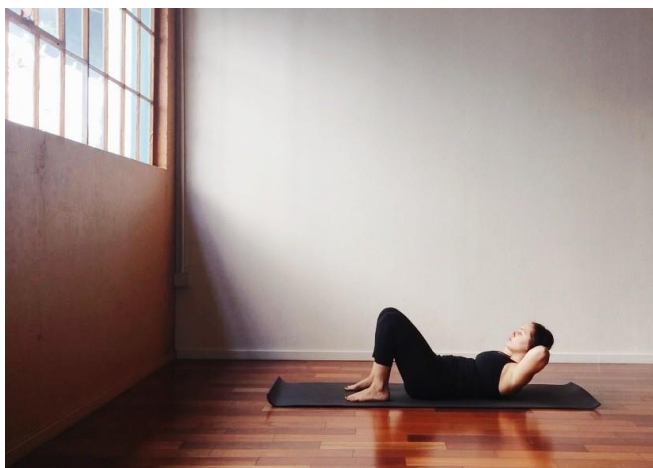
Exhale: float your right leg (lifting from the glutes/hamstring)

Inhale: to tap your right toes to the floor

Exhale to lift; minimizing movement through the entire body — the only thing moving is your right leg.

Repeat 10 times and then switch sides. You can take a rest in Child's Pose whenever you need to.

### Abdominal Series



Our abdominals play a huge role in every pose — both on and off the mat.

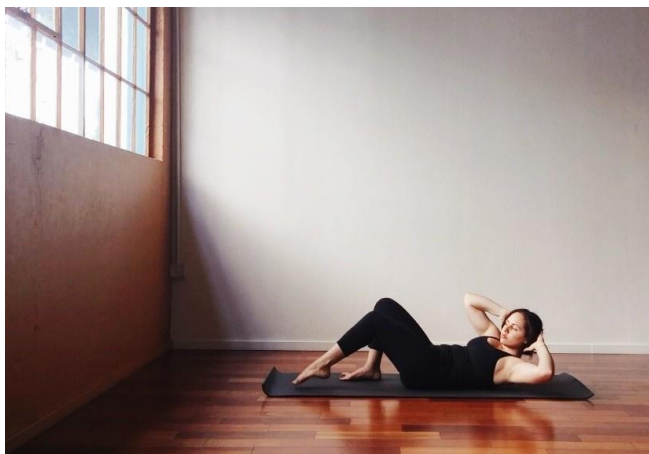
How we walk, how we stand and how we move through space, are all positively affected when our core muscles are engaged and we are rooted from within.

Start by lying down on the floor with your knees bent and soles of the feet planted into your mat. Interlace your hands behind your head as you inhale to prepare.

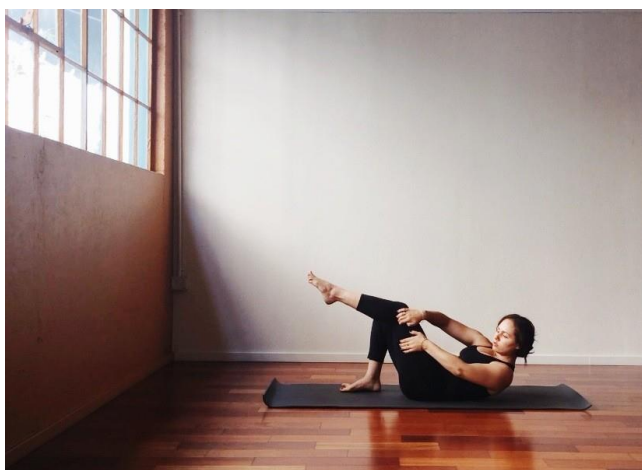
Exhale and lift your head and chest.

Repeat up to 10 times.

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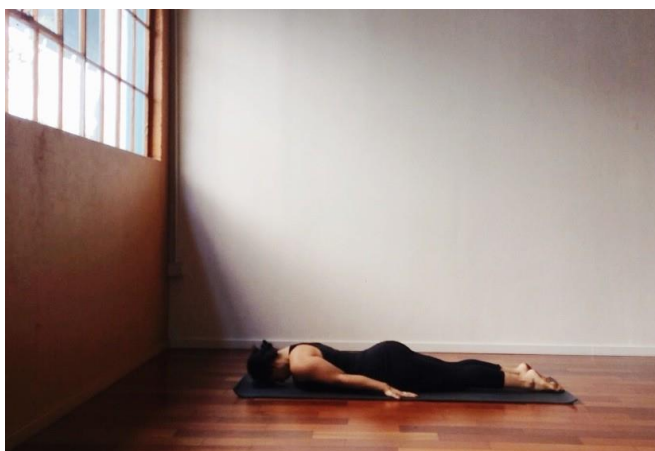
As you curl up to your chest, think of reaching your head toward your knees. Watch that your pelvis is stabilized, making sure your pubic bone curls in toward your belly button as you lift and lower. Reach your elbows wide, allowing your head to be heavy into your hands. Do not push your chin forward. Lift up to the center and hold. Exhale and twist toward the right, trying to keep both shoulder blades off the floor. Inhale and return to center. Exhale and twist toward the left. Repeat 10 times.



Next lift up to the center, twist toward the right and hold. Float your right knee above your right hip (leg is bent at a 90 degree angle). Take both hands to the outside of your right thigh and use your arm strength to lift yourself 1-inch higher. Press your hands into your right leg and your right leg into your hands as you really start to feel your right obliques fire up! Now keep that extra height, and release your hands behind your head. Stay in the twist, keeping the 90 degree bend of your leg. Without changing anything in your upper body, inhale and tap the right toes to the floor.

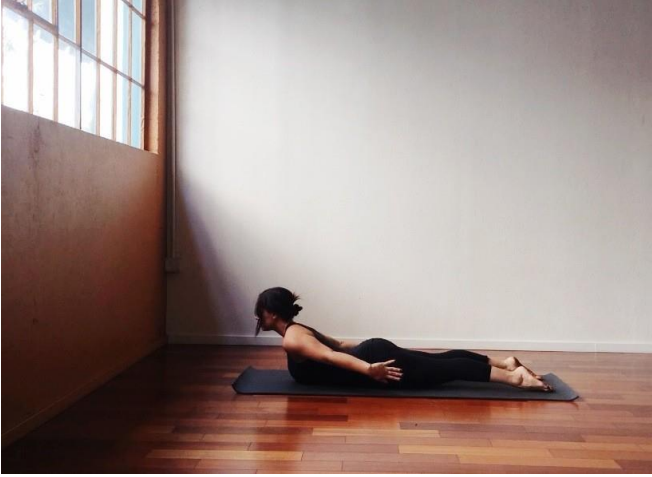
Exhale and lift the knee back on top of the hip, with the pelvis and upper body remaining stabilized. Repeat 5 times and switch sides.

### Back Extension



Begin by lying prone, with your legs long behind you and your arms resting alongside your body and forehead resting on the mat. Inhale to prepare; rolling your shoulders back.

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Exhale and lift your head, chest and arms off of the mat. Reach forward through your sternum/breastbone and find extension through your upper-middle back/thoracic spine. Lengthen through your lower/lumbar spine. Inhale and lower back down. Repeat 3-5 times, and make this more about finding length rather than height.