7 Pilates Exercise to Help Alleviate Fibromyalgia Symptoms

by STARLA RICH

Pilates For Fibromyalgia

Pilates is becoming an increasingly popular form of self-care treatment for individuals with fibromyalgia. Like yoga, Pilates is a therapeutic form of exercise that helps to treat a variety of fibromyalgia symptoms, such as fibromyalgia pain.

Because it is a low-intensity exercise, Pilates is appropriate for individuals of all ages and all fitness levels. Pilates targets the core of the body at the abdomen, back and pelvic floor muscles to create strong base muscles that will support the body as well as tone the body and improve posture.

The focus of pilates exercises is the quality of the movement as opposed to quantity. Pilates controlled exercises promote balance, strength, flexibility, and muscle development, while also helping to relieve muscle tension. Pilates promotes both physical and mental health.

How Can Pilates Help Treat Those With Fibromyalgia?

Pilates can help individuals with fibromyalgia because it helps build muscle strength, reduce joint pain, improve posture, back strength, coordination, overall muscle tone, promote relaxation and reduce overall muscle tension.

Also, pilates exercises help alleviate widespread fibromyalgia pain by focusing on gentle strengthening and low impact movement, while avoiding any jarring movements that can cause injury.

Other symptoms of fibromyalgia can also be alleviated by practicing Pilates. Also, pilates helps to increase overall energy levels, thereby helping to reduce fatigue.

Another benefit of pilates is that it also promotes mental health, and so helps reduce anxiety and fibro fog.

Pilates Basics: What You Need to Know

Pilates is based on core strength, which means an emphasis on strengthening the muscles in your torso. Strong core muscles help support the rest of your body, easing the strain on your back and limbs. Pilates also works your entire body with the goal of creating longer, leaner muscles.

If you're somewhat active and don't have high levels of stiffness, Pilates could be the next step for you in improving your strength and overall fitness level. If, however, your fibromyalgia symptoms and conditions involve problems with exertion, then pilates can lead to symptom flares. It's important to know your limits and stay within them, only expanding them slowly and carefully when your body is ready.

Is Pilates Right for You?

If you haven't been active for a long time, Pilates may not be the place for you to start. Fibromyalgia gives us special challenges when it comes to exercising, and you need to take those into account before starting any type of exercise.

You're likely to feel more exertion from pilates than with other frequently recommended forms of exercise, so it could be more likely to lead to flares or post-exertional malaise.

7 Best Pilates Exercises For Fibro Warriors

Pilates Hundreds

1. Begin with your head down (back of the neck long), knees bent, feet heavy and just under the knees, and arms reaching long down your side with your arms just about an inch or two off your mat.
2. Pulse your arms up and down at your sides energetically while breathing in and out for 5 counts over 10 sets. Take a long breath in through your nose, then breathe out through your mouth.

Pilates Single Leg Stretch

This beginner exercise is done with the head floating up and the legs reaching long and low along with your exercise mat.

1. Keeping your head down and extending your legs to the ceiling, keep your back flat on the mat.
2. Begin with your knees pulled in to your chest, then extend one leg to the ceiling as you tuck the opposite knee to your chest.
3. Switch legs and repeat for 8-10 repetitions.

Pelvic Clocks

This exercise is great to gain awareness of your body. You'll learn how to isolate the abdominals and pelvis while keeping the rest of your body relaxed.

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Make sure your legs are parallel, hip-width apart. Relax your neck and shoulders, bringing your shoulders down away from your ears. Rest your hands on your hips.
2. Imagine there's a clock lying flat on your hipbones: 12 o'clock is at your bellybutton, 6 o'clock is your pelvic bone, and 3 and 9 o'clock are at your hipbones.
3. Contract your abdominals and tilt your pelvis to flatten your back slightly. Your pelvic bone (6 o'clock) should now be higher. Keep your upper body relaxed.
4. Use your abs to tilt your pelvis so that the 3 o'clock hip is lower. Continue to move around the clock, tilting your pelvis at 6 o'clock and then your hip at 9 o'clock.
5. Repeat in the opposite direction. Repeat 2 to 3 times.

Bent Knee Fall-Outs

This exercise works the lower abdominals, obliques, inner thighs, and quadriceps. It's also ideal for pelvic floor activation.

1. Lie on the ground with your knees bent, feet flat, and spine neutral with a slight curve.
2. Draw your shoulder blades down your back, with your shoulders away from your ears to stabilize your scapulae (shoulder blade bones).
3. Exhale, pull your bellybutton in, and contract your abdominals.
4. On your next exhale, let your right knee slowly open to the side without moving your hipbones. Feel a gentle stretch through your inner thigh.
5. As you inhale, bring your knee slowly back to center.
6. Repeat on the other leg.

7. Repeat for 5 repetitions on each leg. Focus on keeping your abdominals engaged.

Bridge

This exercise for your buttocks and lower back helps build strong muscles in the legs and glutes. It can ease back pain and tension.

1. Lie on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor.
2. Exhale and lift your hips off the floor until your body is in a straight line. Squeeze your glutes and engage your core. Hold for 1 count at the top of the movement.
3. Be sure to keep your shoulders on the floor and not to overextend your back at the top, not arching past neutral.
4. Return to starting position and repeat 5 to 10 times.

Heel Slides

This exercise targets the lower abdominals and is best done in socks on a slick surface.

1. Lie on the floor with your knees bent, feet flat, and spine neutral with a slight curve.
2. Draw your shoulder blades down your back, shoulders away from your ears to stabilize your scapulae.
3. Exhale, draw your belly button in, and contract your abdominals.
4. On your next exhale, slowly straighten one knee, sliding your heel along the floor. Keep your spine and pelvis still.
5. As you inhale, bring your knee slowly back to starting position.
6. Repeat on the other leg.
7. Repeat for 5 repetitions on each leg. Focus on remaining stable through the pelvis and using the lower abdominals to move the leg.

Ribcage Arms

1. Start lying on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place your arms straight beside your body with palms down.
2. Inhale and reach your arms back toward your ears. Think about your ribs softening, stabilizing through the ribcage, and pulling your belly in to support the core. You want to isolate the movement of the arms without arching the back.
3. Exhale and bring your arms back down to your side, maintaining stabilization through the torso.
4. Repeat 3 to 5 times.