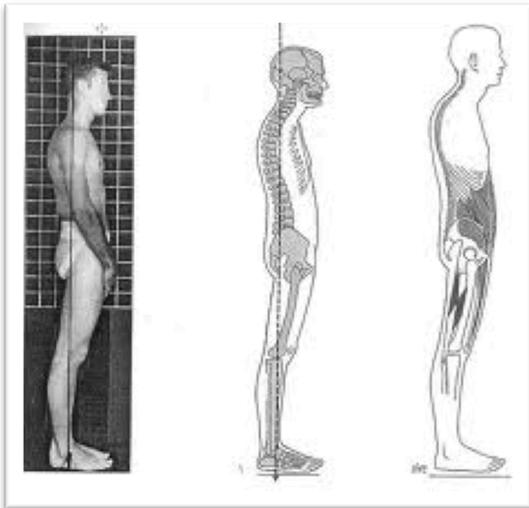


FOCUS ON PILATES: Dancers need more than ballet to achieve balance

A dancer's body needs to be **strong yet flexible**. Dancers must have endurance yet their movements must be **coordinated and fluid**. This is a tall order for growing and developing bodies. Typically, those who excel in classical ballet have what we call a sway-back posture - a posture that allows a great deal of mobility, particularly in the spine, making their movements look very fluid. They also tend to have great flexibility at particular joints such as knees and hips, giving the dancer great range of motion. While the sway back posture is well suited for classical ballet training, it is out of balance, as the following will describe. The lack of balance may lead to serious injury. A well-designed conditioning program is needed to strengthen and restore balance in the musculoskeletal system.



Could this be you?



- Head is forward, neck is slightly extended
- Thoracic spine is displaced backward with a long kyphosis
- Lumbar spine is flattened
- Pelvis is tilted posteriorly and forward of the plumb line
- Hip joints are hyperextended
- Knees are also hyperextended

SWAY BACK POSTURE

Sway back posture is a languid, "Model" stance with hips sinking forward and spine hanging back. (In common use, the term "sway-back" is often also used to describe a lumbar lordosis, but Kendall's use of the term is different.) Hip flexors, external obliques, upper back extensors and neck flexors are elongated and weak and need to be strengthened.

Core conditioning is one of the most effective ways to strengthen this posture and help the dancer maintain a more neutral alignment, where the bones are closer to the plumb line. This is where my area of expertise comes in: **PILATES**.

What is the STOTT PILATES® Method?

STOTT PILATES is a contemporary approach to the original exercise method pioneered by the late Joseph Pilates. Co-founders Moira and Lindsay G. Merrithew, along with a team of physical therapists, sports medicine and fitness professionals, have spent more than two decades refining the STOTT PILATES method of exercise and equipment. The inclusion of modern principles of exercise science and spinal rehabilitation has made STOTT PILATES one of the safest and most effective exercise methods available.

How does Pilates help dancers achieve balance?

To simplify, let's divide your muscles into 2 categories: **mobilizers and stabilizers**. Often our bodies are not out of shape but **out of balance**. If you have one group of muscles stronger or weaker than the other, it may lead to injury.

This can happen to the fittest dancers. Pilates provides the correct balance of light, moderate and high load exercises with slow, controlled movements. Many of the exercises are performed in a closed chain, where one or both feet are on the floor to recruit the stabilizers such as the transverse abdominus, one of the very important core muscles. **Core muscles help support the mobilizers**, much like a foundation supports a house. A well-designed Pilates program will focus on those deep support muscles and give the dancer a sense of inner power and strength. Movements can then be performed with ease and without excess strain.

Benefits of Pilates as described by a well-known dancer

"The first time I experienced Pilates was when I was visiting friends in Los Angeles almost 30 years ago," explains Karen Kain, Artistic Director, The National Ballet of Canada. "I had heard that dancers from New York were doing Pilates, but no one knew about it or was teaching in Canada at the time." "Today I encourage dancers to explore how Pilates can help them physically and mentally for their career," she continues. "Pilates is an ideal form of complete body conditioning as the focus is on strengthening the deep support muscles and balancing all muscle groups around the joints of the entire body." Quote from Pilates for Dancers, as published in Preview, 2008.