

14 Best Pilates Exercises to Build Your Core and Make Better Abs

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You have finally [overcome your weight loss plateau](#) and lost weight, and quite a substantial amount in fact. Reason enough for you to jump with joy and do your share of fist pumping in glee! But though you have made peace with your weighing machine, somehow when you look at the mirror, your roving eye rests on your abdomen and your happiness is short lived, because your abdomen still looks flabby. If you belong to the club of always trying to trim your waist to get those much sought-after washboard abs, then pilates is the way to go!



How pilates changes your body is what everyone from fitness enthusiasts to newbies in the fitness industry are asking in wonderment. Some of the transformations that pilates is responsible for are pretty surprising. It's the latest fitness fad that has taken the world by storm!

Benefits of Pilates

There are many film stars, model celebrities who swear by pilates. It works on your abs like no other workout and helps you to flaunt that enviable waistline which you've always desired. Let's find out the benefits of pilates for women, or for that matter, men. The following points can substantiate why you should include pilates in your workout.

- **Strengthens the Rectus Abdominis** – Pilates strengthens your core from within, while balancing muscle imbalances of the left and right side of the core.
- **Get a Stronger Back** – When [your core gets stronger](#), your back similarly benefits from it. People suffering from lower back pain can get considerable relief from the pain. It stabilizes the lumbar-pelvic Pilates lessens the knot of stress in that area, thus coercing mobility.
- **Takes the Stress Off Your Joints** – The movements of pilates are slow and controlled, thus causing minimum impact on the joints. The use of reformer enhances your workouts even more. Pilates benefits weight loss and hence should be incorporated into your workouts.
- **It Works On your Focus** – Pilates helps you to focus, and helps you zone out all your worries when you are concentrating hard on it. It needs your whole Your work, your worries then take a backseat as you focus on your breath and body movements.



- **Improve your Overall Workout Performance** – [Pilates helps you use your abdominals](#) more for various other workouts like lunges, yoga and even The more you use your abdominals, the better your workouts will turn out to be.
- **It Improves your Flexibility** – If you are thinking that you are not flexible enough to do pilates, try it out to see how flexible you can be. It increases your range of motions, so you can try varying movements without injuring yourself.
- **Boost your Brain** – power- Yes, you can boost your brain power by increasing the brain's alpha peak power. It is related to neural network activity, cognitive functions and the performance of the memory. It even can reduce the progression of degenerative diseases.

Cardio and Pilates

Many people refute the idea that pilates can [rev up your metabolism](#) like a cardio workout. But the following workout can combine the twin benefits of a cardio and a pilates workout. Experience a total body workout and that toned tummy which you always wanted.



- Skip the mat for this standing pilates workout.

Standing Hundred

The hundred is a classic pilates move which works on your core from the inside. The standing pilates workout works the core shoulder and triceps.



- Stand with feet set hip-width apart, arms at sides comfortably, with palms facing the wall behind you.
- With your arms straight, vigorously pump 10 times, back and forth about 3 to 5 inches.
- Inhale for a count of 5, and then exhale for 5.
- After 3 sets of 10, raise left leg in front of your body and continue pumping arms for another set of 10.

Plie with Side Lift

It works on the core, quads and glutes. How often should you do pilates? If that's the question you are asking yourself, remember to throw in three to four days to workout in a week.



- Stand with feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart and extend arms out to sides.
- Turn feet out 45 degrees and bend knees 90 degrees into a plie (not shown).
- Straighten right leg while lifting left leg out to side.
- Lower back to plié position and repeat on opposite side.
- Continue alternating 8 times on each leg, inhaling as you bend your knees and exhaling as you extend.

Crisscross Reach

This workout focuses on the core, quads and glutes.



- Step your right foot about 12 inches to the right and bend your right knee 90 degrees, breaking into a side lunge.
- Reach left arm diagonally up with the fingertips pointing toward the ceiling and right arm diagonally down, fingertips pointing toward the floor.
- Place left hand behind head, elbow bent to the side.
- Exhaling, lift your right knee across your body toward your left hip and left elbow toward your right knee.
- Return to lunge position and repeat to complete 8 reps, and then switch sides.

One-Leg Front Kick and Back kick

Work your core, back and [hamstrings with this very effective move!](#)



- Step left leg forward about 12 inches and bend knee into a lunge.

- Bend elbows to about 90 degrees, hands in front of the face, palms drawn in.
- Raise your right leg behind you.
- Bend right knee and kick right heel toward glutes, foot flexed, and then kick with toes pointed.

One-Leg Front and Back Kick

It works on the core, back and hamstrings, and it tones up these areas effectively.



- While balancing on your left foot, straighten your legs and kick your right leg forward at about hip height, arms extended out to the sides, then kick the leg back.
- Repeat 4 to 8 times; switching sides.

Crossover Sweep

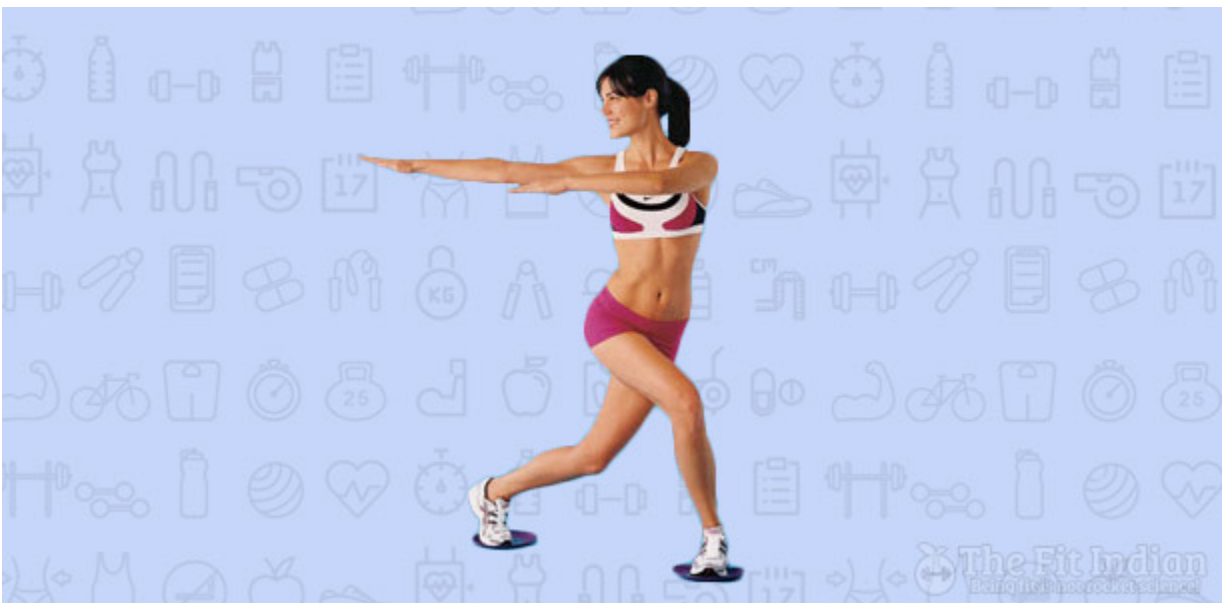
It works out the core, oblique, back and quads.



- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, arms resting comfortably by sides.
- Lift your right leg out to the side 6 inches off the floor and simultaneously sweep your arms across your body to the left, with a flourish.

Sweeping Across

It works out the core, oblique, back and quads.



- Step up the right foot 12 inches diagonally in front of your left foot.
- Sweep your arms across your body to the right as you bend both knees 90 degrees into a "curtsy" lunge. (Your left heel will come off the floor.)
- Straighten the legs as you return to the starting position.
- Complete 8 reps on each leg.

Now we move to the classic Pilates moves which strengthen the abs and help you lose the flab from your abs.

Lift your Chest Move

Keep your core firm and taut by practicing this killer move.



- Start by interlacing the fingers and placing hands behind the head. Position the lower back, into the mat and lift the legs one at a time to the tabletop. Take a deep breath in to prepare and curl up into a chest lift position to begin the exercise.
- Take a deep breath in and twist the upper body towards the left, taking the right elbow towards the left knee and allow the right leg to straighten.
- Inhale in to bring the legs back to the tabletop and the body through the center of our chest lift. Breathe out to twist to the other side.

Criss-Cross Move

This move firms your abdomen like no other. Stiffen your core from within and feel your abdomen tighten and firm up in a few weeks' time.



- As you twist, connect an armpit to the opposite hip bone. Avoid losing the height of your chest lift as you come through the center. To make this movement more difficult, keep the legs straight instead of having one bent. Then perform the exercise with scissor legs, ensuring that you're pointing your toes and not bending the knee.
- Perform 8 to 10 times each side, alternating.
- Intertwine the fingers and place hands behind the head. Imprint the lower back onto the mat and lift the legs one at a time to the tabletop. To ease into this, feel free to keep the legs bent with the feet flat on the floor. Inhale to prepare and as you exhale, begin to curl up with the head, neck, and shoulders.
- You will feel the waist crunch as you curl up, but don't push the abdominals out. Knees should stay right above the hips. Inhale at the top and breathe out to slowly coerce the torso down to the start position.
- Repeat 8 to 10 times.

Tap Your Toes

This exercise challenges your core and [helps the abdomen to become taut and firm](#) within no time.



- Start by lying on your back with your legs bent up and feet flat on the floor. Press your lower back into the mat by drawing your pubic bone towards your belly button and notice how you engage the lower abs.
- Lift the legs one at a time to a tabletop position. Your knees will be kept directly above the hips with the shins parallel to the ceiling. Inhale to prepare and, as you exhale, begin to tap one toe towards the floor, moving from the thigh. Inhale to lift the leg back to the start position.
- First, do one side, then go to the other side; ensuring the legs is back into tabletop before moving to the other side. Avoid arching of the back by keeping the waist cinched in and only go as far as you feel comfortable.
- To make this movement a notch harder, try and reach your arms up to the ceiling to lessen your support and try to tap the toe further away. It is a great exercise for pilates for beginners at home.
- Perform 10 to 12 on each side.

One Straight Leg Stretch

This strengthens the abdominals and develops core control and pelvic stability.



- Start with the legs in tabletop and the head, neck and shoulders lifted, don't crane your neck too much, and place it in a comfortable position. Curl up into a chest lift. Extend one leg up towards the ceiling and place the hands behind the back of the leg. Extend the other leg along the mat until it just hovers off the floor.
- As you inhale, allow the legs to come through the center. Exhale to scissor the legs switching sides. Feel the torso curl up towards the leg, rather than drawing the leg towards the body.
- For a strong stretch through the back of the leg, grab it closer towards the ankle.
- To make the exercise more intense, intertwine yours fingers and place yours hands behind the head, still staying lifted, and continue to scissor the legs. Repeat 8 to 10 times each side, alternating.

The Roll-Up

The classic Pilates pose strengthens abdominals, develops stability, core control, and increases the flexibility of the hamstrings. It also helps in the articulation of the spine.



- Start with the legs in the table top position and hands holding the back of the thighs. Inhale at the bottom and exhale to curl up with the head, neck, and shoulders and continue to roll up through the body until you are seated with your hands raised.
- As you sit tall, inhale to lengthen the spine and stick your feet firmly down on the mat. Exhale to tuck the tailbone under and begin to roll back down smoothly so you are lying on your back.
- Focus on drawing the abdominals back towards the spine rather than pushing them out. If you feel that you get stuck on the way rolling up, push through the feet and feel them propel you to a seated position.

Criss-Cross Move with the Pilates Ring

Increase the difficulty level of the exercise with the Pilates ring. Get the best workout with this neat pilates equipment.



- Start on your back, holding a Pilates ring or the stability ball to the ceiling with the legs in tabletop.
- Exhale to curl up with the body and twist to one side to the furthest extent you can go, extending the opposite leg.
- Inhale to do the same on the other side. Tap the opposite arm to the bent leg and straighten the other leg, keeping it above the mat.
- Keep it quick and do it without many intervals.
- To make this exercise a little more difficult, to keep the legs straight and scissor them, turning towards the leg stretched up to the ceiling.
- Reps: 8 to 10 each side

Pilates gives your abs the shape which you've always wanted. A toned midriff is stuff that dreams are made of. You can wear your favorite clothes, and not have to think of sucking in your tummy when the cameras go click happy! You can get drool worthy abs with or without Pilates equipment, within the confines of your home. Start your regime, and it won't be long till you reach your ab goals!

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