

YOGA & PILATES MYTHS—BUSTED!

BY LAURIE HYLAND ROBERTSON, RYT

At Whole Yoga Healthcare, one of our overarching goals is to introduce the community to yoga and pilates, and to offer opportunities for students who haven't experienced them before to enjoy the tremendous healing benefits. Time to clear up a few misconceptions we've been hearing lately!

MYTH: People like either yoga or pilates, not both; if I enjoy yoga, I won't like pilates (and vice versa).

FACT: It's true that many people gravitate toward one or the other, but the two disciplines have much in common and can be a wonderful complement to form a well-rounded fitness routine. Both yoga and pilates are mind-body exercise systems that require concentration and mindful movement. This ensures an efficient workout (endless reps and heavy weights are *not* part of the program) and reduced risk of injury, as well as powerful stress reduction. You can expect long, lean muscles—not bulk—from regular practice. People usually associate yoga with stretching and pilates with strengthening, but you'll get both benefits from a well-designed class in either area.

MYTH: I'm too out-of-shape/old/inflexible to do yoga or pilates. Alternatively, some think yoga and pilates are "too easy" to be an effective workout.

FACT: Every pose and exercise can be modified to ensure that each individual gets what she needs from the practice. A qualified instructor can always provide a way to make the postures easier—and there's always room to challenge as you become more advanced. If you want a strength-building cardiovascular workout, it's there for the taking; plenty of pro sports teams use yoga and/or pilates to keep their players agile and injury-free.

And the stiffer you are, the more you *need* a yoga/pilates regimen! Tight muscles are weak, dysfunctional muscles, and there's no way to loosen and strengthen those muscles without stretching them. The key is to stretch properly, within your limits, and recognize that progress takes time. And unlike some other forms of exercise, pilates in particular will help your muscles—all of them, not just the abs—work *correctly*.

MYTH: Yoga is a religious discipline, and not appropriate for those of different faith backgrounds.

FACT: Although it's true that yoga began thousands of years ago as a way for sages to quiet their minds and go deeper into meditation, modern Western yoga is much more about cultivating general mindfulness and creating overall ease in the body. You can incorporate your own vision of devotion into your yoga practice, or not, as you choose.

MYTH: Group pilates mat classes aren't as good as private instruction or equipment-based sessions.

FACT: A qualified instructor can provide simple modifications to make pilates accessible to anyone, and most experienced instructors are quite comfortable teaching classes with students of varying levels. Pilates equipment such as the "reformer" provides the resistance for you, so mat-based exercises without the machines can challenge the muscles even more.

Truth is, few worthwhile undertakings are really easy, but if you put a bit of effort into your practice of yoga and/or pilates, you will reap great rewards for both mind and body.

Laurie Hyland Robertson is the director and co-owner of Whole Yoga Healthcare and Whole Chiropractic Healthcare, a holistic clinic and studio in Odenton. (The studio is open to the public and welcomes both beginners and drop-in students.) As a former healthcare editor, writer, and speaker, Laurie brings an objective eye to her classes, making sure students experience the full range of benefits the practice can offer. She is a registered yoga teacher and a certified pilates instructor.



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