

TONE UP, slim down

Want to exercise more than just your muscles? Fitness editor **Martha Lourey-Bird** reveals how to reap mind & body benefits.

Fact one: the benefits of exercise don't stop at improving your physical fitness and appearance. Exercise can also increase happiness, reduce stress and improve digestion. Fact two: you don't need to slog away on a treadmill for hours in order to reap these benefits; you can achieve them simply by learning how to bend and stretch. Read on to discover more.

The benefits of... PILATES

Although Pilates has been around since the 1920s (when it was developed by German boxer/gymnast turned physical trainer Joseph Pilates to help rehabilitate injured soldiers), it only gained widespread attention and popularity during the last decade, thanks to its popularity among celebs like Jennifer Aniston and Madonna. So, what is it? Pilates is essentially a series of stretching exercises for the spine, abdomen and buttocks that tones muscles, improves posture and increases core strength. By doing Pilates regularly, you should find that your deep abdominal muscles – which help to hold your core in place – get

YOUR PILATES WEEK

Monday: 60 minutes of Pilates. Attend a gym class, PT session in a studio, follow a DVD or download your own workout to do at home.

Tuesday: 45 minutes of cardio. Aim for moderate-level cardio like walking, cycling or swimming laps.

Wednesday: 60 minutes of Pilates. Attend a gym class, PT session in a studio, follow a DVD or download your own workout to do at home.

Thursday: 60 minutes of intervals. Run, walk or cycle at moderate intensity, including regular, vigorous 1-minute bursts to up the challenge.

Friday: 60 minutes of Pilates. Attend a gym class, PT session in a studio, follow a DVD or download your own workout to do at home.

Saturday: 45 minutes of cardio. Aim for moderate intensity exercise where you can talk, but not sing.

Sunday: Do an activity you enjoy, like bushwalking or rollerblading.

stronger, improving the appearance of your whole tummy region. As well as making you look slimmer, Pilates aids digestion (through improving posture) and reduces the risk of back pain.

Where to begin: While most people can take up Pilates, if you're new to exercise, over the age of 40 or have had surgery recently, you'll need to be more careful. Sign up for a beginner's class or a one-on-one session so you'll know how to perform the moves correctly. Also, keep in mind that while Pilates is effective for toning, it won't necessarily help you lose weight. To stay on the slim-down track, mix Pilates with more intense cardio such as walking, jogging or cycling. These activities help to burn excess energy and reduce fat stores, especially if you include speed intervals. Regular Pilates in addition to more vigorous activities also prevents boredom and gives you the balance you need to achieve long-term weight loss.

The benefits of... YOGA

According to a study by Melbourne's RMIT University, yoga is now the 13th most popular form of exercise among Australians. The 5000-year-old Indian practice combines meditation and stretching, and has numerous physical benefits, such as increasing strength and flexibility. According to the Mayo Clinic in the US, yoga also has mental benefits and can assist with managing stress, anxiety and depression levels. It also helps to improve overall health,

BETTER THAN FOOTBALL
According to a study by RMIT University, yoga is now more popular than fishing, dancing and Aussie Rules. Who knew?

YOUR YOGA WEEK

Monday: 60 minutes of yoga. Do a gym class, one-on-one session or follow a DVD workout at home.

Tuesday: 45 minutes of cardio. Aim for moderate level cardio like walking, cycling or swimming laps.

Wednesday: 60 minutes of yoga. Do a gym class, one-on-one session or follow a DVD workout at home.

Thursday: 60 minutes of intervals. Aim for moderate level exercise, including vigorous 1-minute speed bursts where you can't talk or sing.

Friday: 60 minutes of yoga. Tone up and de-stress in a class at the gym, with a one-on-one session or at home following a DVD workout.

Saturday: 45 minutes of cardio. Choose any moderate level activity, from Zumba to a Body Pump class.

Sunday: Do something you enjoy, like taking a scenic walk or bike ride.

specifically reducing the risk of heart disease and diabetes, plus lowering cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

Where to begin: If you're over the age of 40, new to exercise or have a pre-existing health condition, first see your doctor for a check-up. Once you have the all-clear, look for a beginner's class and let the instructor know you're new so you can begin gradually and start with the most basic versions of each pose. You can then progress to more difficult versions, and also try other types of yoga (such as Iyengar or Ashtanga) further down the track. Not only will you soon be looking better, you'll be feeling better, too. Just remember to mix up your yoga routine with higher-intensity cardio exercises to increase your weight-loss results. [www](http://www.weightwatchers.com.au)

