

ART153
activity series

Pilates Props: The Magic Circle

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This is the second in a series of articles about Pilates exercise and includes practical applications of the theories and information discussed. This series of articles is written by Ellen Ehrlich, M.A., ESA's Pilates advisor (see advisory board).

THE PILATES MAGIC CIRCLE is one of the two small props created by Joseph Pilates. (The other one is a simple towel.) It has other names including the ring, exercise ring, fitness circle, and fitness ring. In the "Pilates World" the preferred terminology (used by Joe) is Magic Circle.



Joseph Pilates created equipment out of what he had, what was available to him, such as hospital beds and bed springs. For the circle, he used a beer keg ring with wooden blocks on either side. The most common materials currently used are flexible metal and rubber. The flexible metal Magic Circles with rubber pads on both inside and outside allow for more versatility and tend to last longer. The rubber Magic Circles are not as durable and are not recommended for long-term use at a gym or studio. Metal Magic Circles hold up better and are a better value for continuing usage.

The Magic Circle can be used in a Pilates mat class or in conjunction with the Pilates apparatus. It has many versatile uses and is a perfect prop to carry for travel. It provides gentle to moderate resistance and is used to enhance the basic exercises, to add challenge to Pilates exercises, or for stretching and muscle toning. An exercise can be made more difficult by increasing the work on one side of the body or by creating a stability



challenge. The Magic Circle can be used to keep the body part in alignment, which is helpful for beginners. It can encourage specific muscle group activation, add more resistance or increase the level of coordination.



The classic Pilates blend of lengthening and strengthening is well represented by incorporating the use of the Magic Circle. Remind students to activate the core as the circle is compressed.



The Magic Circle can be utilized in many ways to enhance a Pilates mat class. Use the imagination; just holding the circle or putting it between the legs can alter the exercises and keep the Pilates students interested and challenged.

As you think about incorporating the magic circle into the format of

your mat class keep in mind the purpose of the prop in that particular exercise. Will it be used for muscular strength or resistance? Then pay attention to the alignment of the body, with the stacking of shoulders, hips and even ankles. If the body is out of alignment, the muscle groups will be used unevenly which is contrary to the Pilates ideal of symmetry of the muscle groups. This can be demonstrated by the side-lying position with the circle activating the adductors. The student should be “stacked” properly and then the circle will evenly work the targeted muscle group.



The circle can also be used to assist in the isolation and activation of specific muscle groups. For example using the circle for the swan (put circle on it's end on mat in front with hands on top) you can



isolate the extension of the spine in a controlled and safe manner instead of the rocking motion done for the classical exercise. This also helps the less advanced student to focus on form of the exercise without the fear of “bumping” the face on the floor.



The circle can be used to support the weight of the limbs in cases where the legs are extended or held in tabletop while the core is engaged. The student can place one or both ankles against the top of the circle for support of the weight of the legs. This is the type of position which can be stressful for those who are tight in their hip flexors or weak in their core muscles. The circle can help support the legs while the student concentrates on the proper execution of the exercise.



FAVORITE USES OF THE MAGIC CIRCLE SIDE LYING SERIES



Instead of placing the free arm on the floor, place the circle on the floor, opposite the shoulder, arm distance (elbow not locked, shoulder down and back) one pad on the floor, the free hand resting on the top pad of the circle. The circle will help stabilize the core during the leg series. Also, for adductor/abductor work the circle can be placed on the floor with one leg resting inside and one on the top either in pilates stance or parallel stance. Engage core to press top leg down in a series of pulses. Then put top leg inside the circle, pressing against the inside top pad. Bottom leg holds the circle in place. Pulse up engaging the abductor muscle.

THE AB SERIES

Single leg stretch: During the exercise, hold the outside of the circle (fingers long, palms on pads) over the shin (instead of holding the leg).

Double leg stretch: hold outside of circle pads as above hovering over shins with head, neck and shoulders off the mat. Stretch out to "V" position with head between arms. Next, thread the legs through the circle reaching toward the sky, next take the legs out and stretch back to "V" position.

Single straight leg stretch: hold circle on either side above the chest, curl upper body off the mat, legs straight toward sky. Tap one leg twice against the circle as the other leg is extended away (Scissors). Alternate legs.

Double straight leg stretch: Place the legs inside the circle, pads above the anklebones, pointed toes, Pilates stance. Hands behind head, curl up. Lower the legs (inhale, count of 3), flex feet and lift the legs, pushing against the circle (exhale-count of 3). Variation; legs can also be placed on the outside pads of the circle.

CrissCross: Table top legs; place one pad of the circle on the right thigh just below the knee. Hold in place with right hand. Place left hand behind head and place left elbow on the other pad of the circle. Hold the circle in place by the crossed over body position. Release circle from right hand and place it behind head, putting elbow on the floor to stabilize the body. Squeeze the circle by bringing the body up toward the right leg, pulse up 3 times, each time squeezing up higher. Slight release back and repeat 2 more times. You can do 8 pulses and an 8 count hold. Switch sides.

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ART118 QUIZ

In the body of an email to askesaoffice@gmail.com, place your first and last name on the first line and number the page from 1 to 10. DO NOT SEND AS AN ATTACHMENT. Answer TRUE or FALSE to the accuracy of each of the 10 statement below based on the information in this ESA article. You will be emailed a CEC validation certificate of completion, which you must keep for your records. ESA cannot replace lost forms and the article would need to be resubmitted

- 1 - The Pilates Magic Circle is one of the two small props created by Joseph Pilates.
- 2 - The other small prop created by Joseph Pilates is the ball.
- 3 - Joseph Pilates created equipment by consulting with exercise specialists and engineers.
- 4 - The Magic Circle was originally created from a beer keg ring with wooden blocks on either side.
- 5 - The most common materials currently used are flexible metal and rubber.
- 6 - The rubber Magic Circles tend to last longer.
- 7 - The Magic Circle should be used for advanced exercises only.
- 8 - The Magic Circle is a tool that allows the participant to work out of alignment.
- 9 - The Magic Circle can help the less advanced student to focus on form of the exercise.
- 10 - The circle can help support the legs while the student concentrates on the proper execution.