

# Pilates: Pre- & Post-Natal

**Karen Toth**  
**Stretch Your Life**





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## Pilates for Pregnancy

Welcome to my *Pilates: Pre and Post-Natal* book. This book contains safe and effective exercises that you can do during pregnancy and for the first 6 weeks after pregnancy.

Note: Before you begin, it is important to get your doctor's approval to perform the exercises featured in this book.

Since I was pregnant with my children, 3 sons who are now aged 19, 21 and 23, a lot has changed with hospital birthing procedures. For example, now while in hospital waiting to deliver your baby, you may sit on a birthing ball instead of lying in a bed.

In this book, I am going to show you how Pilates can help with childbirth. You will learn

- how to maintain muscle strength,
- when to release muscles to encourage childbirth, and
- a few exercises you can ease into after childbirth (with your doctor's permission).

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### **Disclaimer:**

It is advisable that you consult your physician before starting any exercise program. Karen Toth or Stretch Your Life is not responsible for any incorrect movement or movement not advised by your doctor, chiropractor or physiotherapist.

## About Pilates

Pilates is a system of physical conditioning and rehabilitation developed by German-born Joseph Pilates, over seventy years ago. Born in 1880, Joe suffered from asthma, rickets and rheumatic fever as a child. He devised his program by studying yoga, Zen and other Eastern body movement and alignment routines. His method of conditioning worked so well, that he eventually became a diver, skier, boxer and gymnast. He was even asked to pose for official anatomy charts because of his ideal posture and muscular build.

In 1919 he was incarcerated in England. While there, the men in his platoon followed his fitness regime. No one got the influenza that killed so many that year, proving that Pilates will help with the immune system. Pilates also took springs from the bottom of beds and attached them to walls to assist with the rehabilitation of those injured in the war.

Today Pilates has evolved to be used in post-physio, general conditioning and elite athletic enhancement.

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# 1 Pilates Philosophy

Joseph Pilates believed we should study animals and children; watch how cats move and see how children play. As we get older, we can remain in charge of our future by improving flexibility. Flexibility, like strength, can be increased at any age.

Our bodies were made to move. Let the movements of the Pilates Method maintain flexibility, strength, balance, stability and mobility in your body. During pregnancy, let the Pilates Method show you how to release and strengthen muscles when they are needed.

**Relax your mind and breath.** Breathe in to oxygenate the body and the mind. A relaxed mind can release tense muscles in the body. You will be able to focus on the things that are important. Let your relaxed state facilitate isolated movement.

**Visualize what you are moving.** Use the images provided in this book. Notice the feeling that goes with each image. Let your mind help the body move.

**Focus on quality over quantity.** It is much better to perform 4-5 repetitions with concentration, control, and precision than more repetitions without these qualities. There should be no pain involved with movements in the Pilates Method, therefore, doing more than the prescribed amount of repetitions could cause more harm than good. As you do the exercises you will start to build stamina. Let your body tell you when it is ready to move on, and remember to focus on the movements.

**Let Pilates be invasive in all you do.** Let it influence the way you walk, sit, run, drive, cook, and wash your hair. Notice the way you stand. Notice the way you walk. Notice your shoulders, your back, your knees, your feet, and your arms. Let the Pilates Method improve your daily life so you move “with ease and economy.”

**Believe in yourself.** If you don’t believe, who will? It would be wonderful if we all had a fairy godmother looking after us to make all right in the world, but remember that you are already wonderfully special: you are one out of 2 billion sperm that fertilized the egg that made you. Be patient with yourself: persist and you will be able to do more as time goes on. Notice all the small changes daily and write them in a journal so you can look back from where you end up to see your progress.

**Make a commitment to do the exercises.** Joseph Pilates believed the exercises were best performed 4 times per week. Do some exercises before getting out of bed in the morning, at your desk, while waiting in line at the grocery store, and while making dinner. The most important thing you can do for yourself is to commit to doing the exercises. Write your activities into your day planner and make a date with yourself to do Pilates, even if it’s only for 15 minutes each day!

## 2 Benefits of Pilates

During your pregnancy, Pilates can provide numerous benefits, including:

- Maintenance of muscular strength
- Maintenance of flexibility
- Prevention of sciatic nerve
- Prevention of carpal tunnel
- Development and maintenance of correct posture
- Development and maintenance of pelvic strength
- Development of ability to release pelvic floor muscles for childbirth
- Increased stability for support of increasing weight
- Prevention of incontinence and hemorrhoids.

Following your pregnancy, Pilates can provide numerous benefits, including:

- Restoration of muscles around the perineum
- Awakening of pelvic floor muscles
- Correct movement in pelvis to prevent low back pain
- Increased feelings of rejuvenation and well-being.

# 3

## Pilates for the Mother to Be

### 2nd and 3rd Trimester Exercises

1. Breathing
2. Seated, neck and shoulder rolls
3. Seated back extension on ball, chair or floor
4. Periformis with tennis balls or hands
5. Side stretches
6. Cat stretches and strengthening
7. Stretch between shoulder blades
8. Bridging for strength
9. Side leg extensions and circles
10. Inner thigh circles and lifts
11. Hamstring stretch
12. Quad stretch
13. Calf stretch and Achilles stretch
14. Standing double squat
15. Wall squats
16. Rolling down
17. Kegel exercises
  - 17.1 Pelvic floor exercises
  - 17.2 Pelvic trampolines
18. Kneeling exercises
  - 18.1. Triceps
  - 18.2. Side bend
  - 18.3 Lat pull
19. Rotator cuff series
20. Leg pull
21. Hip hula hoops
22. Hip Loosener
23. Open Chest
24. Relaxation
  - 24.1 Mermaid
  - 24.2 Inner thigh relaxation
  - 24.3 Footwork
  - 24.4 Five minute refresher
25. Shell

### Post-Natal Exercises

1. Cesarean
2. One to two week post cesarean
3. Vaginal delivery

## 1. Breathing

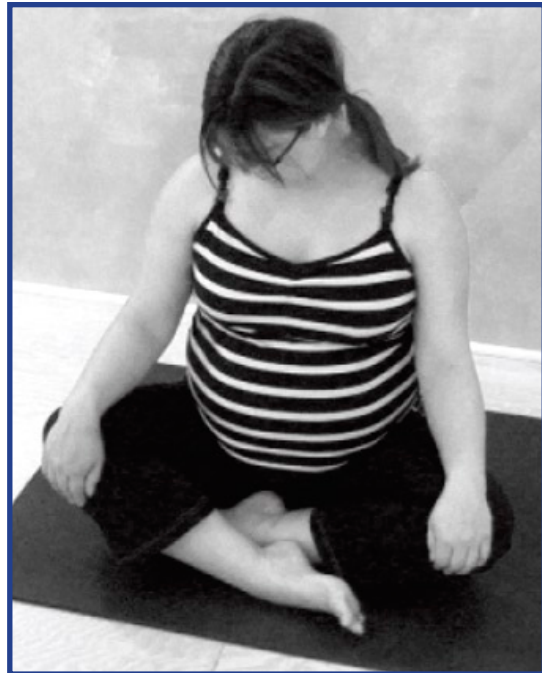
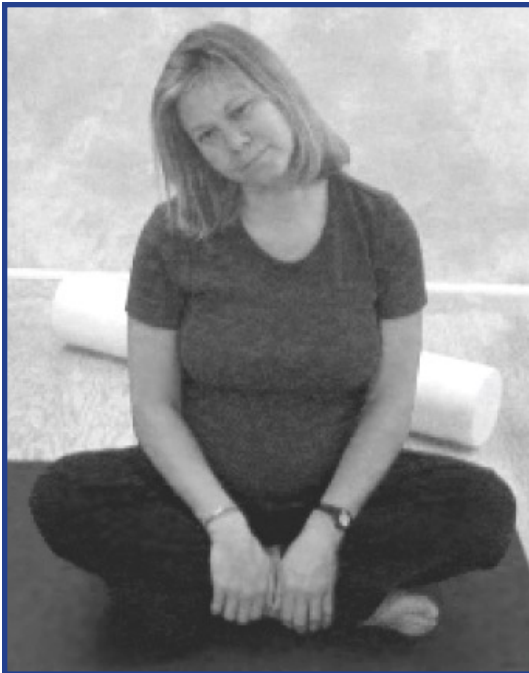
- Lie on your right side in the fetal position. Get as comfortable as possible.
- Close your eyes.
- Inhale deeply. As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your neck.
- Inhale, breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your shoulders.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your arms.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your hands.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your ribcage.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your hips.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your vagina.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your legs.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your feet.
- Inhale breathing in life and relaxation.  
As you exhale, release all the stress and tension from your body.





## 2. Seated Neck and Shoulder Stretches

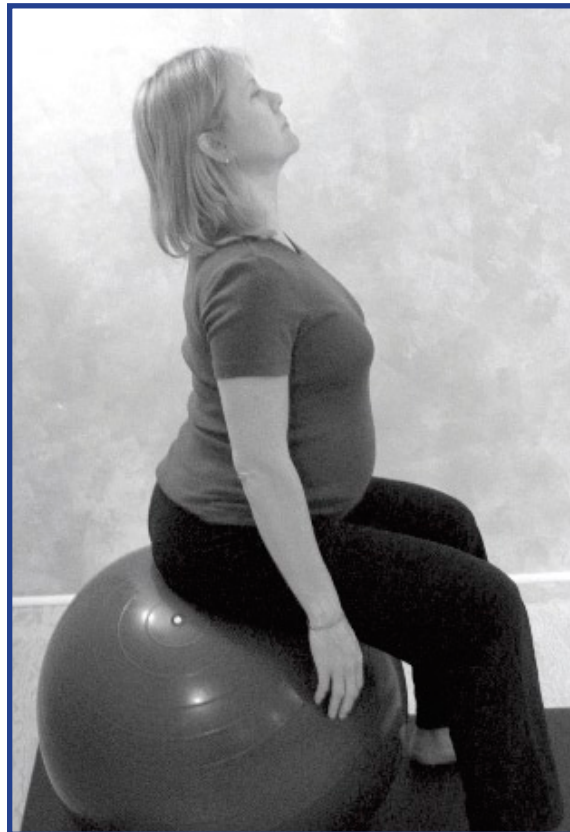
- Sit tall on your sitting bones with your legs crossed.
- Bring your right ear to your right shoulder. Slide your arm pit muscles down toward your hips.
- Repeat 2 more times.
- Return to the starting position. Now you will repeat on the left.
- Glide your arm pit muscles (seratus anterior) down. Bring your chin toward your chest feeling the length in the back of the neck. Exhale and slowly re-stack one vertebra at a time until spine is long.
- Repeat 2 more times.





### 3. Seated Back Extension on Ball, Chair or Floor

- Sit tall on your sitting bones. You can sit on the floor with your legs crossed, on your large ball, or on a chair.
- Inhale to prepare for the movement.
- As you exhale, lengthen through spine, creating length in your spine.
- You should feel the arch in your back. Your shoulders and chest should stay wide throughout the movement. If you feel the movement in your low back, stop and try again, remembering to keep your shoulders and chest wide. Hold the position for 5 seconds.
- Inhale to prepare, exhale lengthen through the spine back to straight.
- Repeat 8 times.





#### 4. Periformis Stretch with Tennis Balls or Hands

I usually use tennis balls, but this is somewhat more difficult. You may start by using your hands.

- Standing with your back against the wall, locate the dimples near the top of your pelvis. Think of the spot in your buttocks that is about 3” to 4” below the dimples. This spot is where you will place your hands or two tennis balls to stretch the periformis muscles.
- Place the tennis balls or your hands on either side of your tailbone and slowly release your weight onto them. This may be quite painful at first, especially if your periformis muscles are tight, and they usually are tight during pregnancy.
- Stay in this position until you feel a release in the muscle.
- Repeat if needed.

#### Variation

Place one ball on either side of your spine near your bra strap, roll up and down.



*Karen's Notes*

Stop if you experience a sharp pain.

Benefits: Lengthens upper back muscles. Opens chest. Great for posture.

*Notes to Myself:*

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*Questions for my Doctor:*

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## 5. Side Stretches

- Sit tall on your sitting bones with your legs crossed.
- Inhale to prepare for the exercise.
- As you exhale, let your right ear fall toward your right shoulder, imagining that your left shoulder is heavy to create length in the left side of the neck.
- Think of your spine as a candy cane and start to round your spine right while lengthening your spine on the left, keeping left buttocks on the mat.
- When you have gone as far as you are able, hold the position and inhale.
- Exhale and lean a little farther into the stretch. Inhale.
- Exhale and start to restack your vertebra, one on top of the other as you come up to sitting tall.
- Repeat 2 more times on this side.
- Uncross your legs and re-cross the opposite way. Repeat the stretch for the other side.



Set up for a side stretch



Bend without straining





## **Stretch Your Life**

**“Be the high performer you would like in your life.”**



Karen Toth is an Anat Baniel Method (SM) Practitioner and a Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement ® Teacher, One of six Pilates instructors featured on Rogers Cable Daily, she studied with Susan Greskevitch and Margot McKinnon at Body Harmonics, Toronto, Ontario and is certified through The Physical Mind Institute and Body Harmonics Pilates. Over the past 8 years Karen has taken numerous courses to extend her skills, including Pilates for Pregnancy, Pilates for Post Rehab and Pilates for Gait training.

Karen's favourite line from Joseph Pilates is, "if there is pain, there is no gain." Her mission is to show her clients how to promote vitality, rejuvenation and relaxation. If you enjoyed this book, look for Karen's videos, audio CDs, and Pilates Basics e-book, or visit her website at [www.stretchyourlife.com](http://www.stretchyourlife.com).

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