

## Pilates Method Level IV

Does your local fitness center offer Pilates instruction? If so, they may only teach the basic ideals and exercises. You (and even your Pilates instructor) may be surprised to learn that there are actually four levels of Pilates instruction to complete before you can be considered a true Pilates master.

The Pilates Method is a series of controlled movements that were carefully designed to work with the body, not against it. There are more than 500 exercises involved in the complete Pilates Method, each categorized according to the ability of the performer. These include the Essential, Power, Intermediate, and Advanced levels.

The fourth and final step in acquiring complete success in the Pilates Method is the Advanced level, or Pilates Method Level IV. This is the ultimate plateau of Pilates, and incorporates the most difficult exercises. This highly powered and revitalizing workout is designed for those students who have mastered the Essential and Intermediate Pilates movements. Many people even consider this level to be the "ultimate challenge".

Pilates Method Level IV is no doubt perfect for the experienced movers. However, before you can perform these very intricate movements, you must acquire a complete understanding of the basics of Pilates, including its principles and safety precautions. Without full knowledge of the basics, you may perform the precise exercises improperly, resulting in imbalance and even injury. You may not even be able to learn the Level IV exercises if you have not acquired approval of your Pilates instructor.

A few of the advanced exercises involved in Pilates Method Level IV are as follows:

### Leg Pull Front to Downward Dog

Sometimes viewed as a variation of the push-up, there is much more to this challenging Pilates Method Level IV exercise. Begin in the push-up position, with the right foot extended off of the floor. Lift the right leg toward the ceiling and move backwards to a Downward Dog position. With the right foot still off of the floor, extend the spine forward to return to the push-up position. Repeat on the other side, holding the left leg off of the floor. Repeat two more sets.

### Corkscrew Advanced

To begin this advanced exercise, lie on your back with legs extended toward the ceiling. Arms are extended to the side. In this position, rotate your pelvis to the left using complete control. Curl your tailbone off of the floor, and swivel the pelvis to the Plow position. Next, rotate your pelvis to the right, and control the right side of your spine back onto the floor. Use your abdominal core to center the pelvis to the floor, and extend your legs away from your head. Repeat to the other side, and then complete five more sets.

### Shoulder Bridge

Start this Pilates Method Level IV exercise by lying on the back with your knees bent and feet in parallel position. If you feel as though your back is working too hard, modify the height of your pelvis. To properly complete this Pilates Level IV exercise, it's essential that you know how to lift the pelvis up using the strength of your legs. When you are able to do this, use your legs to bridge your pelvis off the floor. Exhale with a hollow breath, lift your left thigh and extend your leg to the ceiling. Inhale, and lower your straight leg to the floor while maintaining the bridge. Exhale, and extend your left leg back to the ceiling. Then, return your foot to the floor. Complete the same circuit of movements and controlled breathing, while using your right leg. Do the same movements now with your right leg. When complete, your lower pelvis will return to its original position. Repeat three more sets of these exercises.

Obviously, successful completion of Pilates Method Level IV exercises requires a clear understanding of the principles of Pilates, including concentration and breathing, and the basic positions, like the "Downward Dog" and the "Plow". Other advanced exercises that you will encounter while practicing Pilates Method Level IV are the Single Twist, Double Leg to Side, Jackknife, Rolldown, Rollover, Hips Up Bicycle, Swimming, Mermaid, Double Leg Kick to Side, Boomerang and countless others.

While these precise movements were designed to create a healthy, strong body, they can cause serious injuries if not performed properly. Be sure to check with a qualified Pilates instructor before proceeding through the various method levels.