

THE ONE LEG CIRCLE



“The Pilates Method of Body Conditioning is gaining the mastery of your mind over the complete control over your body.”

The benefits of the One Leg Circle often aren't fully appreciated, but if you look at “Anatomy”, you will see just how useful this exercise is. If used as part of the warm up as it is in the complete original sequence, it fully prepares the legs for all the movements to come, as well as preparing the core for its stabilising role during those exercises. It's a good exercise to help improve body awareness and gives ample opportunity to use all of the Pilates principles. Although perceived as being an easy exercise of little value, mainly because it isn't one of those challenging strength exercises, it is very hard to perform well and by emphasizing this, it can change a client's perception of it so that they learn to value it more.

Anatomy

- Increases hip strength and mobility.
- Builds a healthy, functional hip joint.
- Lengthens the hamstrings and adductors.
- Strengthens the adductors and vastus medialis, the innermost of the quadriceps muscles and often the weakest.
- Stretches the iliotibial band (ITB).
- Improves the core muscles' stabilising role as well as strength.
- If you add the twist variation, you are improving spinal mobility, stretching the abductors, ITB, deep into the gluteals and the lower back.

Method – 6 repetitions each leg, 3 in each direction

- Laying supine in neutral position with the core muscles engaged and arms pressing firmly into the mat, raise one straight leg as you exhale, pointing the toes towards the ceiling and turning the leg a little to save over-use of hip flexors and quads. The other leg is straight along the mat with the foot flexed.
- Inhale to prepare and as you exhale stretch your leg out to the side and then forward, drawing a semi-circle.
- As you inhale, take the leg across the body and back to the starting point, making one complete circle.

Teaching Points

- Watch for unwanted movement of the hips.
- Cue to relax the neck.
- Remind clients to keep circles small enough so that they have total control.
- Get clients to focus on the back of the opposite hip to ensure it doesn't move during the circle.

Modifications

- Both knees bent.
- Knee drops are a good preliminary exercise: knees and feet together, feet on the floor and as you exhale, take one knee out to the side and towards the floor. Inhale on the way back up. This is a good modification for anyone whose back problem won't allow them to lift a leg.
- Working leg bent to table top, gradually straightening the leg as control improves, together with hamstring length and core strength.
- Start with circles the size of saucers and increase the size with practice.

Variations

In the original exercise, Joseph Pilates allowed the hips to be more involved, whereas more modern version work at total core stability. It feels really good to finish this exercise with a supine spine twist, especially in the original sequence. So keeping the shoulders firmly on the ground, stretch the leg across the body, allowing the hips to roll but keeping the shoulder still, head turning in the opposite direction. Repeat 5 times before circling the other leg.

Imagery

- Draw circles on the ceiling/wall (depending on the size).
- Wipe the inside of the teacup/barrel/hula hoop clean with your big toe.
- Imagine a tray of marbles resting on the pelvis and no marbles are to move.
- Imagine your pelvis is a basin of water filled to the brim and no water must spill.
- Hold a bank note under the opposite hip.