

Pilates Conventional or Complementary?

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Opinion

The Pilates method was developed by the German Joseph Pilates in the 1920's and is still widely practiced today. Joseph Pilates based his work on three principles: breath, whole-body health and whole-body commitment, with the whole-body encompassing mind, body and spirit. It is a very physical form of activity based around "centering" which involves working the core muscles for strength gains, whilst centering the mind and breath to support this development. The physical activity aspect of Pilates, strength gain, is often overlooked as with the Pilates principles traditionally cited as: Breath; Concentration; Centering; Control; Precision; Flow mean Pilates is placed as an "alternative" or "complementary" therapy and side lined to a certain extent by both the sports and medical communities.

Despite being frequently categorized as alternative or complementary by both the medical and sporting communities a growing scientific interest in Pilates can be evidenced when looking at the number of scientific publications (Figure 1).

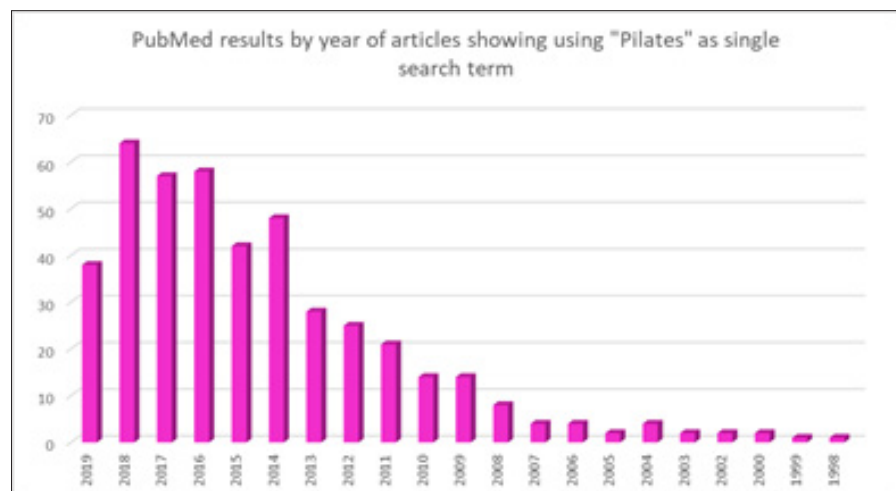


Figure 1: PubMed result.

Of the approximately 430 articles found on Pubmed [1] when using Pilates as a search term over half have been generated in the last 5 years. This is suggestive of a growing awareness of Pilates and a deepening acceptance of its scientific value. Within these articles there are a number related to positive gains in healthy individuals [2-4] and even more relating to the benefits in different disease populations, for example breast cancer [5-8] and mental health [9-12]. Despite the scientific communities deepening interest there is a paucity of data relating to the overall strength gains and any concomitant biochemical changes.

There is some evidence that complementary and alternative medicine health promotion concepts are internally consistent and increasingly in agreement with the current health and wellbeing concepts in conventional medicine [13]. This commentary shows that the interest in the Pilates method continues to grow and does not require data relating to strength and biochemistry to continue to expand its popularity. Yet the degree of agreement

between conventional and alternative medicine could be further consolidated with more sports or medicine-based studies with satisfactory sample sizes providing stronger evidence for all the medical communities to accept and prescribe Pilates. "Above all, learn how to breathe correctly." - Joseph Pilates

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