



# energy source

## Getting Reiki while doing Pilates might be the ultimate in mind-body-spirit healing

BY TERI WINGENDER

You've been looking forward to your private Pilates session all day. But after four meetings, two client presentations, 100 emails and a mad dash to pick up a sick child at school, you have a backache, your brain is fried, and your energy is kaput. You don't want to skip Pilates, but how are you going to be able to focus?

Today many of us turn to natural healing techniques rather than drugs to not only revive but thrive. Holistic therapies you're probably familiar with include massage, acupuncture, reflexology and aromatherapy, and because they work on multiple levels at once, we call them integrative. Massage, for example, not only soothes muscle aches and improves blood circulation but is also emotionally calming. And in our Pilates practice, we experience the wisdom—and results—of integrated body, mind and breath every time we do the work.

The underlying principle of all mind-body modalities is that human beings are composed of energy systems, including electric and magnetic. Albert Einstein once said, "Everything is energy, and beyond that is Supreme Intelligence." Research also correlates with traditional teachings regarding a universal life force or energy. According to ancient systems, this energy permeates and surrounds everything and is known as *prana* by the

Hindu and Vedic system, *chi* in Chinese medicine, *ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek and *ki* in Japanese healing. When our vital force is sound, theory holds, we enjoy good health. But when there are interferences with that energy, we suffer. Therefore, by working on our *chi*, we affect our whole self.

### Using Reiki with Pilates

From the beginning of history, humans have practiced various methods of energy work—accessing the universal life force to heal ourselves or others—with prayer, crystals, color, sound and touch. Reiki (RAY-key), which is not connected to any religion and is completely safe, is a technique for stress reduction, relaxation and healing originated by Mikao Usui, PhD (1865–1926), an accomplished scholar and a Japanese Buddhist monk. According to Reiki lore, Usui received the gift of Reiki during a 21-day fast at the sacred Mount Kurama. Reiki is a combination of two words in Japanese: *rei* (spirit) and *ki* (life) force energy.

To give Reiki, a practitioner taps into and then channels the universal *ki* through his or her hands. If you're receiving Reiki in a typical one-hour session, lying down on a massage table while you're wearing loose-fitting clothing is common, but you can receive healing

energy in any position, including during a Pilates class. Most people receiving Reiki report feelings of relaxation and a sensation of warmth or tingling. Anyone can learn and practice Reiki; beginners first undergo an attunement process, during which their energy fields are opened by a Reiki Master. Once attuned, Level I practitioners learn basic hand positions to channel energy, and after a certain of degree of mastery attain Level II and finally can become Reiki Masters themselves. Practitioners often find that the more they practice, the more sensitive and intuitive they become to sensing where healing energy is needed.

If this sounds a bit woo-woo, that's understandable, and in fact it's logical to suspend belief until you see results. Tara Hart, PhD, a Pilates instructor and Reiki Master with her own studio, Core Kinetics ([corekinetics.com](http://corekinetics.com)), in Redmond, WA, acknowledges that energy healing invites skepticism. "I'm a scientist with an academic background," Hart says. "I would not have believed in energy healing had I not had a chance to collect my own data about it. I invite people to withhold judgment and live in curiosity about the data points and collect more." Adds Lynda Lippin, a Pilates instructor and Reiki Master at Parrot Cay Resort in the Turks and Caicos islands ([pilatesandreikiinparadise.com](http://pilatesandreikiinparadise.com)): "I'm



Western-based and not necessarily into new-agey things. But the reason I chose Reiki of all the healing modalities is because it always works.”

## Open to Possibility

Lippin says that if people are open to trying Reiki (and consent is foundational to the practice), they can help boost the healing benefits of Pilates. “Most clients come to Pilates with some sort of pain or imbalance in their bodies, even those who are fit and healthy,” Lippin observes. “Injury and disease show up in the energy field. Reiki strengthens and clarifies that field, which helps the body make positive physical and neural changes.” She adds, “If a client allows me to use Reiki, it’s really easy to transmit energy at the same time you’re doing Pilates.”

Katie Todd has been a Pilates teacher (at Body Mechanics in Portland, OR) for six years and a Reiki Master for 20 years, and she explains to clients that hands-on energy helps muscles to relax and eases tension. “Reiki is such a physical sensation,” Todd says. “It’s really exciting to feel it in your body and to know that your body can move energy and has an energetic life of its own.”

The teachers interviewed for this article use Reiki intuitively in all kinds of ways during a Pilates session: to help clients move through a challenge, to calm and focus before or during a session, or as a break in the middle. “As Pilates instructors we’re helping clients put their presence in their minds and their bodies,” Todd says, noting that some of her students will actually stop on the Reformer to receive energy healing to

release tightness. “It’s an extra tool you have to help people get in touch with their bodies, to release tension, whether it stems from a physical cause or a deeper issue, trauma or injury,” she says. “After learning Reiki you become more of an empath. People who work with bodies do get a sense of where their clients’ energy is, but I feel sometimes my hands have a mind of their own.”

Hart says using Reiki with Pilates is all



part of discovering one’s potential. “I try to create curiosity and exploration in my Pilates classes. It’s so fun to see what unfolds. That’s what gets me up every day—watching this unfolding and metamorphosis. People come to Pilates because they’re discovering sides of themselves they didn’t know they had.”

## Inside Out

The teachers point out that a physical symptom is often the outward expression of an emotional or mental trauma. And because Reiki addresses a person’s whole being, it can get to the root of the problem. Says Hart, “People may walk in the door with an idea of what they want to do, but sometimes the pain isn’t just

pain, it’s emotional holding, and Reiki can help tap into that.” Todd, who used to work at a Pilates studio that focused on helping sexual-abuse victims, found Reiki very helpful with that population.

Hart often offers Reiki to students who are “stuck,” she says. One beautiful place to use it is in Short Spine, where people really need to soften to the upper thoracic,” she says. “If you’re stuck in the heart chakra and holding around the bra line, you’re not going to be able to articulate well. So if a student is struggling or jumping over that articulation, even while their feet are up in the air, I can just put my hand there and it will start to soften.”

Karen Gisme, 54, a consultant in Redmond, WA, became a student of Hart’s around the time she began her Reiki training. “She’d share what she was learning with her students and just kind of experiment with it,” relates Gisme. “When I couldn’t move in a certain way, or if she noticed I was off-kilter, she would apply Reiki and my body would move in the direction she wanted it to.” Gisme says Reiki also helped alleviate a shoulder problem. “I had a calcium deposit impinging on a muscle, and so other muscles had been compensating with a lot of holding,” she notes. “Reiki helped me release some of those bad habits, and it helped my other medical treatments, including physical therapy and acupuncture, be more successful.” She’s grateful to Hart for offering Reiki to her cousin Jill, who passed away from breast cancer in her mid-30s. “Jill found Reiki so calming and relaxing, and Tara helped her immensely. It really brought her relief and peace in the last couple of months.”

## Let it Flow

When Lippin's students are struggling, she says, Reiki helps them "let go and let it flow. I find half the time the problem is people are just really stressed, not focusing on their bodies or not breathing so their shoulders are in their ears and their backs are tight. They're workers. When they're exercising, they're working. When they're relaxing, they're working. They ask, 'What can I do to feel better?' when the answer is 'How about stop doing?' Pilates is about learning how to not struggle and still be strong. On a certain level, it's about maximum gain for least effort."

Hart often uses Reiki to help students achieve effortlessness. "I tell students I'll give them five minutes of Reiki but then let's go back and try that Teaser again," she explains. "And all of a sudden they're more integrated—the energy is flowing out of their head and that lifts them up into the Teaser and they're like, 'What just happened?' Side splits are a perfect example of where noneffort is the key to success. "If everything is open and flowing—the thighs are coming together and bringing the carriage in; the energy is shooting out from the bottom of feet all the way up to the head—then there's no effort," she says. "But if you're stuck in the heart chakra, there's no upward flow. It's all coming from muscular effort and you're just in your head. Pilates is at its finest when it's practiced with that effortless quality that comes from energy that's beyond us."

## Help with Healing

Clients rehabbing from injuries and surgeries are common in Lippin's practice, and she says that Reiki helps them immensely. "One of my clients had had



a total lumbar fusion, so I worked with her before and after the surgery," she says. "We'd do a combination of relaxation and breathwork using Reiki with Pilates, which helped her stay calm and focused." Another client with severe headaches and insomnia worked with Lippin, alternating two Pilates sessions with two Reiki sessions every week. "Ultimately Pilates will help you function better and get stronger," explains Lippin, "but if you're not sleeping and



having headaches, it's hard to do any mechanical fix if you don't have that relaxation to start with."


With each client, Todd offers the option to do a full one-hour Reiki session instead of Pilates if they are not feeling up to a workout—or to use part of the time having Reiki and, if they feel more energized, to spend the remainder of the time doing Pilates. "Sometimes, if someone is having an emotional day, it will come up in the middle of a workout, and we can stop and focus on it," she notes. "Alternately, I've had Reiki sessions where people wanted to suddenly leave the table to go to move because that's what their body wanted—and then it's great to

have the Pilates equipment right there to go do stretches or just do footwork so they can move through their energy."

## Healing Thyself

Another wonderful thing about Reiki is that you can use it to help yourself, anytime, anywhere, say the teachers. "A main part of learning Reiki is the self-healing practice," notes Lippin. "You have to work on yourself. The process of learning Reiki, all the way from Level 1 through Master level, forces you to work on yourself before you work on other people." Adds Hart, "I use Reiki as a tool to take care of myself and to be present in my own life. It also enables me to hold space for someone for who they are and for them to unfold in a way that's supported by the universe."

## Raring to Reiki?

If you're interested in becoming attuned and learning Reiki, go to [reiki.org](http://reiki.org) to locate reputable Reiki teachers and classes in your area. You can also download a free online newsletter, video clips and background information. It is not recommended that you learn Reiki or become attuned using a computer learning or distance course, neither is comparable to directly received Reiki attunements. 

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