

## Bringing mindfulness to the practice of PILATES

By Belinda Munro, 2010

### What is “mindfulness” & what is its relevance to Pilates?

Mindfulness according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, scientist & meditation teacher is the *awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, & non-judgmentally to things as they are*. Mindfulness means paying attention to things as they are in any given moment, however they are, rather than as we want them to be.

Let's look at the definition of Mindfulness in relation to the practice of Pilates.

Firstly, mindfulness is **intentional**. We can act with awareness. In contrast unawareness is about being lost in thought, not present in the moment. Disconnected from mind & body. We as teachers are aware, Pilates is a mind-body practice. Applying mindful intention to the session allows the client to be aware of incorrect movement patterns as well as correct movement patterns. When the person is aware of connections being made that previously they were unaware of, a significant psychological & physical shift occurs, not only reinforcing the neuromuscular connection but also a positive association with Pilates in general & therefore an exercise practice that the client is more likely to continue with long term. Therefore reap the benefits of regular balanced exercise.

Secondly mindfulness is **experiential** as it focuses on the present moment. In contrast, when our minds are elsewhere from the direct experience there will be a dis-connect from our bodies, the person will therefore not enjoy the full benefits from the Pilates practice. There are times the person will be distracted by pain or injury. Pain results in our stabilizing muscles “switching off” therefore adding to discomfort. It is human nature to want to avoid or disconnect from pain or discomfort, however pain is part of life & a valuable teacher if we allow ourselves to be alongside the discomfort skilfully rather than being “pulled” by it. In relation to Pilates, pain gives us feedback to what is appropriate movement for the where the body is today. It is highly beneficial when one is able to be present to the pain & distinguish between pain that is telling one to back off or the body being challenged in a healthy appropriate way that is beneficial.

Thirdly, mindfulness is **non-judgmental**. It allows us to see things as they actually are in the present moment & to allow them to be as they already are. Have you noticed in your practice a person battling with an exercise, getting really frustrated with themselves? In that moment there is a wonderful opportunity to observe where the body is today without judgement. As a teacher observe yourself without judgement, do you need to adjust your cueing to assist the

participant, do you need to allow the person to just try the movement without getting it “perfect”, you may decide to change the exercise or piece of equipment the person is on & return to the exercise later in the session instead of staying “stuck” in getting it right rather than integrating the movement with correct muscle activation. A judgemental approach from the teacher or participant is going to reinforce the incorrect movement pattern & result in negative experience for the person. Positive associations with movement over a period of time result in reduced discomfort, improved self-belief & commitment to the exercise programme, in our case the practice of Pilates.

As you go into your next session with a participant or class, just notice your own breathing, notice thoughts or feelings that may distract you from this present moment. Just notice without judgement, bringing your attention to this very breathe in & out. Allowing this simple way of being to permeate the space, creating a Whole Body experience to the Practice of Pilates for both the participant and you as a teacher.