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About the Author

Ellie Herman, M.S., LAc, runs two thriving Pilates studios, one in San Francisco and one in Oakland. The Ellie Herman Studios offer annual teacher training intensives in Northern California. Ellie has certified instructors locally, nationally, and internationally. She has taught Pilates for over ten years and has developed a unique language to communicate the essence of the Pilates method. She was first introduced to Pilates in 1988 as a rehabilitation patient at Saint Francis Hospital Dance Medicine in San Francisco. She received her formal Pilates training in 1991 in New York City, where she studied with two of the original Pilates protégés, Romana Kryzanowska and Kathy Grant.

Formerly a professional dancer and choreographer with her own dance company, Ellie has a background that includes contemporary dance techniques, yoga, gymnastics, kinesiology, and anatomy. She is a licensed acupuncturist with a Master of Science degree in acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. In her studios, Ellie combines Pilates with acupuncture and body work to offer a complete rehabilitation and wellness environment. Ellie strives to integrate her studies and continually expand her approach to bring balance back to the body. (Check out Chapter 4 for photos of Ellie in action.)

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Introduction

Pilates has become one of the most popular fitness methods in the United States. Every other Hollywood star seems to be doing it, and Pilates mat classes are offered at almost every gym in every small town around the country. This book is primarily meant to give you a comprehensive overview of the Pilates mat workout. In addition, I include lots of information about the background, history, and philosophy underlying the Pilates method. If you want to go beyond the mat, you also can find information about Pilates equipment and accessories and special programs for the pregnant, the elderly, and the injured.

About This Book

You can read every *For Dummies* book straight through, from the first to the last chapter. Or, you can browse through it, flipping to chapters that you find especially interesting. But given that Pilates is a discipline in which you really get better gradually, you probably don't want to jump straight into the complicated exercises.

You can use this book in several ways:

✓ If you're a novice, you probably want to start right here in the Introduction and then read Part I, which contains the first three chapters. Then introduce yourself to Pilates by doing the mat series in Chapter 4. If you want, you can then skip ahead to Chapters 11 through 14, which contain exercises using Pilates accessories that you can add to your routine. If you're new to Pilates, I recommend that you stay away from the more advanced exercises until you have some experience with the basic movements and have given yourself a chance to build your strength and increase your flexibility.

✓ If you already know a lot about Pilates and are just looking for a few more exercises to add to your routine, flip through Chapters 4 through 14. But I recommend that you take a minute to familiarize yourself with the Pilates alphabet in Chapter 3 first. You also can find some Pilates tidbits that may be new to you in all of the other chapters.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is divided into five parts. In general, you can skip around and read different parts — but I recommend that you read Part I first and then Part II before looking too deeply into the other three parts.

Part I: Pilates Basics

If you're new to Pilates, I recommend that you read Part I first. It has the good stuff on how Pilates got started, how it's different from other exercise forms, what the benefits are, and lots of other tasty tidbits. Even if you're in a hurry to get to the exercises, I advise you to take a look at the Pilates alphabet in Chapter 3. The alphabet is a learning tool I've invented to make explaining basic Pilates movements easier. You can jump straight to the exercises without reading about the alphabet, but in the long run, you'll save yourself some time if you read about the alphabet first.

Part II: Mat Exercises

Part II is organized very simply: First, you start with the fundamental Pilates mat series, and then you move on systematically to the beginning series, then the intermediate series, and then the advanced series. I highly recommend not straying from this order because this is the order developed by the man himself, Joseph Pilates. There is a definite logic to the order, and if you start at the beginning, your body will be preparing to advance in a gradual and healthy way.

Don't just jump to the advanced exercises — at worst, you may hurt yourself, and at best, you won't be doing the exercises with proper form.

In Part II, I also give you some special exercises that may appeal to you, like special butt exercises from Chapter 9 or a lovely spine stretch from Chapter 10. In these chapters, the level of the exercise is noted so that you can make a decision as to whether you can handle it.

The chapter on super advanced exercises (Chapter 8) is another one that isn't really a series but is instead a selection of exercises you may insert into your advanced series (Chapter 7). This is where you can get a little creative, but I still recommend following the basic series listed in Chapters 4 through 7.

Part III: Beyond the Mat: Exercises Using Equipment and Accessories

Part III goes beyond the mat exercises to show you some photos and descriptions of Pilates equipment and accessories. Chapters 11, 12, and 13 show you exercises that you can do with affordable accessories. Chapter 14 shows you exercises that you do with your back to the wall, literally. And Chapter 15 is about the heavy equipment. This chapter is meant for those of you curious about going to a fully equipped Pilates studio or thinking about buying equipment for your home.

Part IV: Special Situations

Part IV may be the most important part of the book for you. If you're pregnant, or have been pregnant recently, read Chapter 16. It's all for you. Chapter 17 has special advice if you are older, have a bad back, or have stiff shoulders (like from sitting at a computer all day!).

Part V: The Part of Tens

The Part of Tens is in every *For Dummies* book. The chapters in this part each list ten Pilates-related factoids for your quick review.

Icons Used in This Book



When you see the Tip icon, you know that a piece of advice is coming that can make your life easier. It may be a way to modify an exercise, a way to make Pilates more affordable, or just something that can save you some time.



Some things are worth remembering. This icon flags the really crucial stuff that you should keep in mind.



Mainly, I use this icon to keep you from hurting yourself. If you see the Warning icon, make sure to read the adjacent paragraph carefully. You may be very glad you did!



Pilates is a mentally rigorous form of exercise. This icon flags images that you can hold in your mind's eye to help you perform an exercise correctly.



When you're ready to make an exercise harder, look for the Advanced Stuff icon. It flags modifications that you can make so that the exercises are more challenging.