

Feeling stiff happens to bodies of all ages. Watch as an infant, or a cat, awakens from a nap. The natural response is to realign their body. They stretch as muscles move their bones and readjust soft connective tissue back to balance.

One of our Pilates clients, in her mid sixties, comments on how many people she knows who "are so stiff." She sees they have difficulty bending, reaching, standing, or walking. The same is true for all ages, including young teens.

People who look stiff in their movement may actually be feeling tension, inflexibility, tightness, strain or even pain. The antidote commonly recommended is stretching. Stretching does lengthen muscles, releases soft connective tissue, and increases range of motion. However common stretching is not what the body always needs, especially if the strain in the body is advancing to presentation of pain symptoms. It can actually increase the feeling of stiffness by creating more instability.

These more advanced feelings of dis-ease in the body are common for today's society because of underuse, overuse and just plain abuse. Long hours in a flexed seated position, limited daily physical movement, and then going all out as a "weekend warrior" puts burdensome demands on the myofascial system. This creates neurological irritations, fascial adhesions, and muscle fibrosis leading to joint dysfunction. Then the body enters the realm of hip pain, knee disorders, ankle weakness, rotator cuff dysfunction, spinal degenerative disc disease (DDD), stenosis, osteoarthritis (OA), etc. These are joint issues.

Where two bones come together in the body is a joint. Movement happens at these joints. There are more than 206 joints in the adult body. Muscles move the bones and with this intent through exercise a desired result of balance is achieved. Looking at the bones as part of the soft connective tissues system allows work on a deeper level to create profound lasting changes in bodies.

A Pilates student usually has had or is dealing with a chronic issue or strain/stress pain patterns in their body. They may have been in a vehicle accident or had a sports injury. This experience has given them the opportunity to be mindful in their exercise. Once mindful exercise becomes the foundation they bring their bodies into more dynamic and power uses.

The precision of body movement in your exercise program is executed with concentration during the movement. This fine tuning of your exercise gives you your desired result. In Pilates, you move the bones. Moving the bones, you are affecting the soft connection tissue attached to the skeleton. The muscles, fascia and ligamentous tissues are brought into a resting balance and the skeleton assists with posture.

Joseph Pilates commented, "We retire too early and we die too young, our prime of life should be in the 70's and old age should not come until we are almost 100." In order for this to happen we need to take care of our joints, and Pilates is the exercise routine that accomplishes this.

Our mid sixties Pilates client remains limber, and continues to increase her fitness level through lessons with Reformer, Cadillac, Chair and mat exercises for the full Pilates repertoire. She finds working with the understanding of joint releases beneficial specifically for her neck, ribcage, lower back and ankles.

Living Well Pilates always welcomes questions regarding Pilates and offers free first time assessments. Simple contact us by phone, e-mail, or website form to set up your time for a session. For more information on body movement exercises, including videos, visit www.livingwellpilates.com or our Facebook Page.

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