



# Pilates Unbound

## New Fusions with Yoga, Dance and Boxing

by Aimee Hughes

With 11,000 studios across the U.S., “Pilates continues to grow because an increasingly wide spectrum of people are discovering how it can benefit them,” says Elizabeth Anderson, executive director of the Pilates Method Alliance, in Miami.

Pilates instructor Amanda January, who works at The Carriage Club, in Kansas City, eventually became an instructor because, “I love the challenge of it. I had always been a dancer, and found Pilates provides the movement therapy that my dance classes lack.”

Current trends are combining Pilates not only with yoga, but also dance and even boxing. “My favorite fusion Pilates class is barre,” says Halley Willcox, a certified Pilates teacher originally from Austin, Texas, now a grad student at the University of Arizona, in Tucson. Barre classes mix classical ballet exercises with yoga and Pilates (see [Tinyurl.com/Barre4Fitness](http://Tinyurl.com/Barre4Fitness)).

The boxing variation, called piloxing, incorporates pugilistic moves and

barefoot interval training. “No prior experience is necessary; the possibilities are endless,” comments Willcox.

Anderson believes, “The growth we’re observing is due to the fact that Pilates addresses fitness across the entire body, rather than parts. It creates a wonderful feeling of overall well-being; the exercise is done in a balanced manner on all planes and is coordinated with conscious breathing. Plus, it doesn’t cause injuries, it prevents them.”

### Fosters Self-Confidence

“Through focus and breath awareness, Pilates, not unlike meditation and yoga, helps you become more aware of your body, which makes you more comfortable in your own skin,” says January.

Social psychologist Amy Cuddy’s TED talk, “Change Your Posture, Grow Your Confidence, Follow Your Dreams,” shares the results of her Harvard University research, which demonstrates how people that assume what she calls “power postures” actually change the

chemistry in their brains, boosting confidence on many levels. Pilates is recognized as a highly effective way to improve posture.

## Helps Coordination and Rehabilitation

Many dancers and professional athletes access the therapeutic qualities of Pilates to help them recover from injuries and enhance balance and coordination. Anderson remarks, "With a qualified teacher, Pilates can be applied as a post-rehabilitation modality once post-surgery physical therapy is completed, to further strengthen the body. Elite athletes such as professional dancers, baseball and football players, ice skaters and equestrians are also finding ways that Pilates can strengthen and assist them with their performances, well-being and injury prevention."

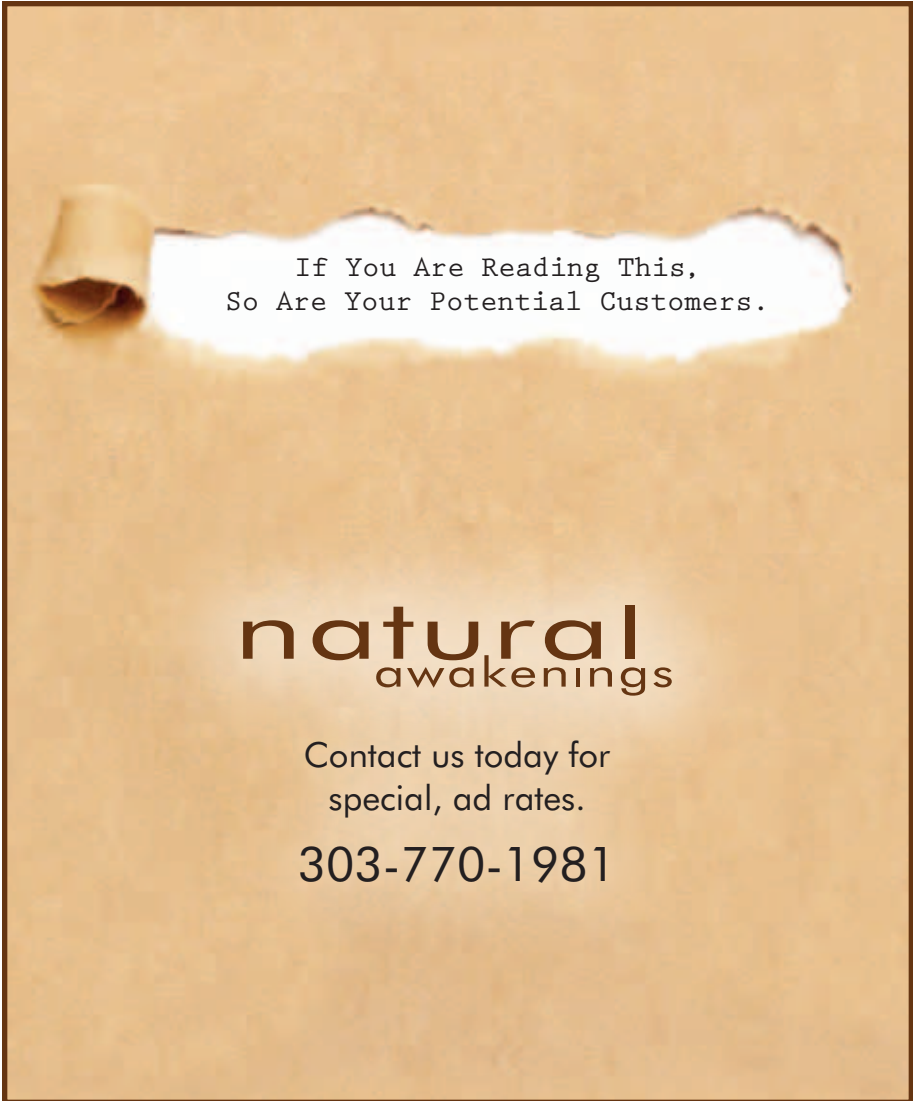
One of the ways that Pilates helps is by affecting body fascia. "Muscles work together, not individually, within the fascia, and the best way to change the muscle is through resistance," says January. "It's why Pilates uses spring tension, resistance bands and even jumping. Pilates improves balance and coordination because all the muscles work together. The entire body is learning how to dance in unison with itself."

## Boosts Immunity

"The more I committed to a regular Pilates practice, the more I noticed I wasn't getting sick as often," says January. "Pilates helps boost the immune system through reducing stress, a well-known contributor to disease. It's accessible to people of all ages. You don't have to be flexible or strong to begin, just willing."

She offers this advice to beginners. "Check out all the local studios to see what they offer. It's best to start out taking classes twice a week with a certified teacher for two to three months. That's easy to commit to. Then you can see if Pilates is right for you."

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