



Start your session on the Pilates Arc to boost spinal mobility, warm the core and connect to your breath.

By Nora St. John • Modeled with Portia Page
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THE SPINE CORRECTOR WAS APTLY NAMED BY JOSEPH PILATES—CORRECTING THE SPINE IS WHAT IT DOES BEST! Mr. Pilates designed and built differently shaped Spine Correctors to match the curves of his clients. I like Balanced Body's Pilates Arc because it works well with clients of different sizes and levels of flexibility, and because you can flip it over to add new exercises and challenges to the original repertoire. This workout, one of my personal favorites, is designed to move and stretch the spine in flexion (forward bending), extension (back bending), lateral flexion (side bending) and rotation. The curve of the barrel provides excellent feedback for the body, helping you to feel where your spine is moving well and where it may be lacking mobility. The Side-Lying Arm Circles open the chest and help to increase spinal mobility by loosening the front of the hips; when that area is tight, it can limit the range of motion in spinal flexion and make the whole body feel tense. This workout shouldn't take more than 15 to 20 minutes, and is a great way to get your day or your class started (teachers, see tips throughout). Let's get moving! **PS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN COX; MAKEUP BY JESSICA CHYNOWETH AND HAIR BY SARA COLLEY; NORA'S TOP BY SOYBU; HER OWN BOTTOMS; PORTIA'S OWN CLOTHES

GENERAL GUIDELINES

PROPS Pilates Arc; sticky mat; padding (optional)

BREATH Breathing is an excellent tool for enhancing spinal mobility. In general, exhale with flexion, inhale with extension, and use one-lung breathing to focus the breath on the expanding side in lateral flexion.

REPS Many of these exercises can be intense, so I like to keep the reps moderate. Do only as many as you can while keeping your form in tact! Remember what Joe wrote: "Concentrate on the correct movement each time you exercise, lest you do them improperly and thus lose all the vital benefits. Correctly executed and mastered to the point of subconscious reaction, these exercises will reflect grace and balance in your routine activities."

TIPS

- This is a great routine to do every day. It deepens the breath, warms the trunk and invigorates the senses.
- Add padding if the spine is sensitive.
- All of the exercises that don't use the bottom of the Arc can be done on any Spine Corrector you may already have.

LIP ABDOMINALS

PURPOSE teaches integration of the lumbar spine (lower back) and pelvis to promote lumbar flexion; strengthens the abdominals

SETUP Sit in neutral at the edge of the Arc's lip (the edge of the step) with your knees bent and feet sit bone-width apart on the floor. Extend your arms in front of you at shoulder height, palms in.

1. Exhale as you engage your abdominals and posteriorly tilt your pelvis to round your lumbar spine without sliding off the lip.
2. Inhale as you return to the starting position. Do 4–8 reps.

TEACHER TIP Place the tips of your middle three fingers on the spinous processes of the lumbar vertebrae to make sure your client is moving into slight flexion. Many clients will focus on thoracic flexion and miss activating the lumbar spine.

ADVANCED For additional inner-thigh and core activation, externally rotate your hips with the heels of your feet together; press your heels together throughout. Or keep your legs parallel, and place a small (4–5-inch) ball above your knees; squeeze it as you roll back.



SETUP



STEP 1

WELL ABDOMINALS

PURPOSE increases abdominal strength and spinal mobility in both flexion and extension

SETUP Sit on the step of the Arc with your knees bent and heels together (as shown) or in parallel; feel the support of the barrel behind your lumbar spine. Place your hands behind your head.

1. Exhale as you press your lower back into the barrel and begin to roll down, keeping your back connected to the barrel throughout.
2. Inhale as you move your torso into extension over the barrel, rolling back only as far as you feel comfortable and you can keep your lower back connected to the barrel.
3. Exhale as you roll up to the starting position, peeling one vertebra at a time from the barrel.
4. Inhale as you feel the length of your spine. Do 6–10 reps.

TIPS Focus on feeling each vertebra as you roll down and up, and use the feedback of the barrel to help identify tight spots. Breathe into these tight spots to enhance mobility.

TEACHER TIPS Limit the range of motion to what is comfortable and safe. Some clients will easily roll all the way onto the barrel while others will stay off it, as Portia is demonstrating here.

ADVANCED Lift one leg off the floor with your knee bent, both legs with your knees bent, or extend your legs into a Teaser position.



MINI SIDE SIT-UPS

PURPOSE targets lateral flexion in different areas of the spine to boost mobility in the thorax; helps to pinpoint and correct imbalances between the two sides

SETUP Sit sideways with your bottom hip and thigh in the valley between the step and the barrel and your knee bent. Extend your top leg in parallel. Place your hands behind your head.

1. Inhale as you lean over the barrel with your bottom elbow pointing forward.
2. Exhale as you press your bottom ribs into the barrel to lift your torso into lateral flexion.
3. Inhale as you return your torso to the barrel. Do 4–6 reps on both sides.

TIPS Keep your bottom elbow forward so the range of motion in the side-bend begins below a neutral position of your torso. Use the pressure against the barrel to mobilize your ribs.

TEACHER TIP Be cautious doing this exercise when lateral flexion is painful or inappropriate.

ADVANCED Reach both hands overhead.

GEAR GUIDE

Balanced Body Pilates Arc® (\$159—includes DVD and booklet; pilates.com)

MERMAID

PURPOSE strengthens the whole side body, from the abductors through the lateral torso to the shoulder; balances the lateral torso; creates three-dimensional core strength

SETUP Same as step 1 of Mini Side Sit-Ups, but extend your top arm by your ear.

1. Exhale as you reach your top arm toward your feet and roll your torso off the barrel.
2. Inhale as you reach your arms to a T position and straighten your torso.
3. Exhale as you laterally flex your torso toward your top leg while reaching your top arm overhead.
4. Inhale as you return to the starting position. Do 4–10 reps on both sides.

TEACHER TIPS Notice how different this exercise is with each client. The lateral system can be very uneven, so work on balancing it with more work on the weaker or less on the coordinated side.

MODIFICATION Limit the range of motion.

ADVANCED Add rotation in the seated position.



SIDE-LYING ARM CIRCLES

PURPOSE opens the chest; stretches the abdomen and possibly the hip flexors

SETUP Lie sideways with your bottom hip and thigh in the valley between the step and the barrel, and both knees bent. Rest your head in your bottom hand with your elbow forward, and extend your top arm by your ear.

1. Inhale as you circle your top arm and rotate your torso toward the back, only going as far as you can comfortably go in your shoulder.
2. Exhale as you circle your arm to your hip and then forward, rotating your torso as you move. Do 3–6 circles on both sides.

TEACHER TIP This is an opportunity for the client to find and work the stretch in any way that feels comfortable. Let the client explore to find their stretch.

MODIFICATION Limit the range of motion in the shoulder by placing your top hand on your shoulder and focusing on the torso rotation.

ADVANCED Make the movement big! Reach your top leg back into hip extension and keep your pelvis perpendicular to the floor as you circle your arm backward to the maximize the stretch.

SWAN ON THE BOTTOM OF THE ARC

PURPOSE activates the back muscles to facilitate extension; adds dynamic movement to Swan exercises

SETUP Detach the step and turn the Arc over, so it's curved side down. Lie facedown on the flat side with your pelvis aligned with the peak of the barrel.

1. Place your hands shoulder-width apart in front of you on the floor, and gently rock the Arc back and forth, finding your center of balance.
2. Once that's comfortable, rock back as you reach your arms forward, and then rock forward and bring your arms back to the floor. Do 6 reps.
3. Reach your arms overhead and extend your spine as you rock the Arc back; try not to let your feet hit the floor. Do 6 more reps.

TIP Start slow and build up as you become more comfortable in the position.

MODIFICATION Omit step 3.

ADVANCED Try to control the rock of the Arc to create a moment of suspension at the peak of your back extension.



SIDE LEGS ON THE BOTTOM OF THE ARC

PURPOSE adds a significant balance challenge while making it more comfortable for the greater trochanter

SETUP Lie sideways on the flat side of the Arc with your hips over the peak of the barrel, legs stacked, and bottom forearm on the floor underneath your shoulder. Extend your top arm overhead (as shown), place your hand on the top of the Arc or behind your head.

1. Inhale as you lift your top leg toward the ceiling in parallel, reaching your top arm toward your leg.
2. Exhale as you return to the starting position. Do 8–10 reps.
3. Add side-lying variations, such as side legs lifts with your thighs turned out, leg circles, side leg kicks, etc. Do 8–10 reps of each variation.

TIP Doing side leg lifts is easier on the bottom of the Arc, but any exercise that moves the leg forward and back makes for a major balance challenge.

ADVANCED Place both hands behind your head with your lower elbow on the floor.

ROLLOVER

PURPOSE provides support during the rolling

SETUP Turn the Arc back over, so it's flat side down. Sit on top of the barrel, and slowly roll down the low slope using your abdominals (or assisting the roll-down with your hands), until your shoulders are on the floor. Press your upper arms into the floor to keep the pressure off your neck, and hold onto the sides of the barrel. Extend your legs toward the ceiling.

1. Exhale as you engage your abdominals, and then reach your legs overhead and peel your back off the barrel, until your legs are parallel to the floor.
2. Inhale as you open your legs to shoulder width, and then flex your feet and roll back down one vertebra at a time. Do 3 reps.
3. Reverse the movement by rolling up with your legs shoulder-width apart and feet flexed, and then rolling down with your legs together and feet pointed for 3 more reps.

TEACHER TIP This can be a good way to help clients learn how to control a Roll-Up. The Arc provides support for beginners, and can be gradually moved farther away as the client progresses.

MODIFICATIONS Pull the Arc under your shoulders so your spine has support throughout the roll-down. Or simply roll up a little, and then roll back down, rather than going into the full inversion. This exercise is not recommended for anyone with spinal injuries or other conditions where inversions are contraindicated.

ADVANCED Push the Arc farther away. Or add Jackknife or Corkscrew to increase the core and coordination challenge.



Having taught Pilates since 1988, **NORA ST. JOHN** creates teacher-training courses in Pilates, CoreAlign, Barre, Bodhi, Anatomy in Three Dimensions and MOTR for Balanced Body. Nora has studied dance, Chinese medicine, massage, The Franklin Method, Anatomy in Clay and personal training to enhance her understanding of the body in motion. She is currently focused on creating educational experiences that are innovative, enlightening and effective. Nora holds degrees in biology, dance and traditional Chinese medicine, and is the author of 11 teacher-training manuals and several magazine articles.



PORTIA PAGE has been in the fitness industry for more than 25 years as a teacher, a program and fitness director, an international presenter and an author. She is the education project manager for Balanced Body and the author of Pilates Illustrated (Human Kinetics). Portia has a bachelor's in cognitive science from UCSD, and is PMA-, ACE- and AFAA-certified.