

More Than Just Running: Yoga and Pilates

Running is great form of exercise. In addition to its many health benefits, running offers stress relief after a long day at work or a challenging day with the kids. However, running may not be *all* you need in your exercise routine. Because running requires certain muscle groups, deficits in any of them can lead to muscle imbalances and injuries. To maintain optimal function of the body, it is important to cross train with other forms of exercise and activities. A few excellent choices are yoga and Pilates.

Personally, I have a tendency to get caught up in the “I need to focus on running and weight lifting to ensure a good amount of sweat is produced” type of exercise. But when I sustained an injury that forced me to curtail high-impact activity, I turned to both yoga and Pilates for rehabilitation and exercise. I quickly became a believer in both programs as they built stability, core strength and flexibility. It was amazing for me to see how much I could sweat during a 45-minute yoga session!

Yoga and Pilates have been around for a long time. There are similarities and crossover in both forms of exercise.

- Yoga was initially developed thousands of years ago as a way to improve spiritual and physical health and has now become a popular form of exercise that millions of people participate in daily.
- Pilates was developed by Joseph Pilates in the mid-1920s as a form of rehabilitation from injuries but has now also become a mainstream form of exercise for core strengthening and muscle toning.

You don't need any fancy or expensive equipment to participate in these programs. (There are some Pilates programs that use equipment, but it is not an absolute necessity.) You can sign up at your local gym for classes led by an instructor or there are many inexpensive or free programs to follow online at home.

There also are differences between yoga and Pilates.

- Yoga incorporates poses like Downward Facing Dog and Warrior 1 that use broad muscle groups and are repeated to improve flexibility and motion of joints. It includes a focus on breathing, balance and stress relief. The poses are repeated multiple times.
- Pilates is mainly a work out on a mat. The exercises are against gravity and include short movements that are not repeated. The movements focus on the core muscles of the abdomen, spine and hips.

Both yoga and Pilates need to be done consistently to obtain improvement in function.. Both also offer significant health benefits, including reduced stress, increased flexibility, increased muscle strength, increased lung capacity, optimization of the cardiovascular system and decreased injury rates. All these benefits can, in turn, make you a better athlete and runner.

Which program is best? There is not a right or wrong answer to that question. Both are going to improve your overall health. My recommendation is to try both to see which one best fits your needs. You also might find that a combination of both programs improves your health and enhances your training program.

Many of the running-related injuries I see in my sports medicine clinic are due to overuse, poor mechanics and muscle imbalances. I always ask about other forms of exercise and have found that those who do not cross train, tend to be more prone to injuries due to imbalances. That's why I highly recommend cross training with other forms of aerobic exercise (biking, swimming, elliptical), weight lifting and yoga/Pilates. In addition to fewer injuries and improved conditioning, cross training may also help you increase the distances you run, the speed of your runs and make you a better and more competitive athlete overall.

If you have any questions on initiating an exercise program or are dealing with injuries that are preventing you from exercising, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of our sports medicine physicians at Spectrum Health Orthopedics at (616)267-8860. You can also find more information about our orthopedic program and providers on our website at <https://www.spectrumhealth.org/patient-care/orthopedics>.