

411 ON FITNESS

Poolates: Mix of Pilates, water is easier on the joints

Rebecca Pfeiffer mixed water exercises with Pilates, coined the term Poolates, and has eager students diving in.



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You love Pilates, or the idea of Pilates (it concentrates on strengthening the core, read: tighter abs) but, for what-

ever reason, working out on land isn't advisable for you. Maybe your joints hurt; maybe you're looking for something different.

Enter Poolates.

Like peanut butter and chocolate, water and Pilates work quite well together.

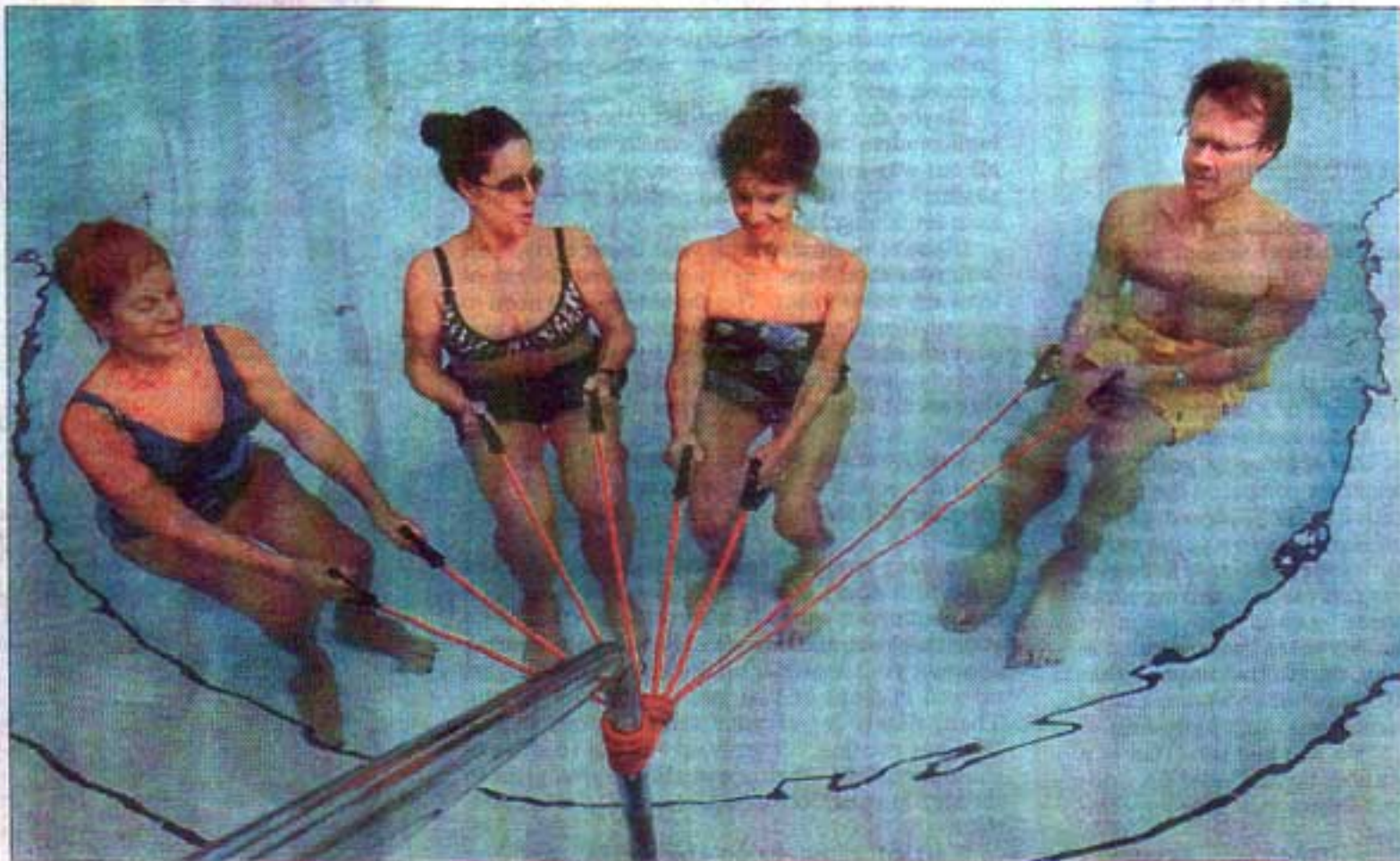
The idea is simple. Poolates is a water workout merging the core strengthening principles of the Pilates method with the benefits of aquatic exercise. By using water's natural resistance and small equipment such as balance boards, surgical tubing, pull-buoys and water noodles, Poolates' prescribed movements target the arms, legs and mid-sections.

Instructor Rebecca Pfeiffer came up with the idea for Poolates 2½-years ago, she says, when one of her Pilates students, a swimmer, balked at having to leave the pool to hit the mat.

"She didn't want to haul herself out of the pool to go to mat class, so I said, 'How can I make this work?' Within the same week a couple of older, heavier clients could do mat work, but getting up and down off the floor was difficult."

She wondered if they could get the same benefits from Pilates if they added water because aquatic exercise is easier on the joints.

Pfeiffer, who previously worked for the Department of Health and Human Services under Donna Shalala during the Clinton administration, began adapting Pilates movements for water use and soon trademarked Poolates in the United States and Canada.



PHOTOS BY NURI VALLBONA/HERALD STAFF



POOL GAME: Top, from left, Marion Pigache, Poolates instructor Rebecca Pfeiffer, Arlene Cardozo and Howard Cohen work out at Ritz-Carlton on Key Biscayne. Above, Pfeiffer, second from bottom, gives them more pointers.

"I didn't want it to be a novelty; it can challenge the professional athlete," she says.

Water. Challenge. That gets this former competitive swimmer's attention. Pfeiffer's now running a twice-weekly, hour-long Poolates class at the Ritz-Carlton on Key Biscayne. That's where we caught up with her on a recent overcast Friday morning. It was only beginning to thaw after a cold snap so the class was small — three of us. Pfeiffer likes that, more individualized attention. The water was heated to well over 80 degrees and felt like a blanket.

I, being the youngest, the only male and a bit of a show-off, figured this water work would be a cinch. Surely it couldn't be as strenuous as 10,000-yard daily swim practices or lifting weights for an hour in the gym.

And it's not. But it is demanding, and after an hour of walking across the floor of the pool while lifting the knees above the waist, leg circles, pushing a pull-buoy under water with the back of a leg and doing double knee lifts on

SMART BOX

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Poolates exercise class.

WHEN: 10 a.m. Monday and Friday.

WHERE: Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, 455 Grand Bay Dr., Key Biscayne.

HOW MUCH: \$120 for package of 10 classes.

INFORMATION: 305-773-0560 or www.poolates.com.

the pool steps, I felt like I had a real workout. Who knew concentrating and moving at the same time could be such a chore?

To get the most out of Poolates, correct form is essential. Your goal is to work the core, but if your hips shift forward, taking the emphasis away from the stomach muscles, the

movement's benefit won't be maximized. At first, my hips were like Ricky Martin's — nonstop action.

Soon, with Pfeiffer's coaching, I got the hang of it. Poolates wasn't hard, per se, the exercises are straightforward and simple to understand. Doing them properly will give you a good workout.

"It's keeping me young," Marion Pigache, 77, said after class. Pigache, who visits Key Biscayne every year from her home in London, extended her stay at the Ritz by two weeks to squeeze in a couple more classes. She liked regular Pilates but joint problems caused pain.

Since taking up Poolates, "everyone says I'm walking differently. At one time I couldn't walk down a hill, now I can do everything."

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