

FIRST STEPS PILATES
The **JANE THOMAS** PILATES Way
Absolute Beginners Pilates Matwork Course

Sample

Here's a few pages from the ebook you will receive when you join an Absolute Beginners Course with us. The whole book corresponds to the classes you will have each week of the course, along with the online videos you can watch. Your Pilates with us is part of a complete structured programme.





Week 1

Let's Lie Down

Lie face down — It's more comfortable lying flat and face down this first exercise can be done on hands and knees, making a table top with your body.

Let's practise breathing — breathe in and relax your stomach, feel it spread out on the floor, then breathe out and pull your belly button up to the spine. Repeat this until you really feel the connection of those deep abdominal muscles, then once you feel that try to maintain the recruitment and continue to breathe naturally.

Now we want to find those muscles in your bottom — collectively known as the glutes or 'utees' — try to relax your legs on the floor with your feet in a pigeon-toed position. Now maintain your deep abdominal recruitment, and take a breath in. When you are ready to breathe out try to squeeze your buttocks and feel your legs pulling/rolling in as you squeeze. Now repeat this, squeezing those glutes every time you breathe out and maintain your deep abdominal recruitment throughout. As we spend so much time sitting down these days it is really important that we start to use our glutes as they are a vital part of our core stability and they often become lazy and don't fire up when we need them to so this **Big Squeeze** exercise will get them working again and make them stronger.

Now let's look at our upper back and an exercise called **Swan Dive** — this is a postural exercise as it works the muscles which can become overstretched and cause that hunched/rounded/shouldered look — which isn't a great look after all, and which can cause lots of problems around the neck as well as affecting our lower back. It is quite a subtle exercise so will need you to connect the mind and body. Firstly, when you are still recruiting those deep abdominal muscles then place arms on floor in a 'W' shape so that elbows are level with shoulders. Take a breath in and when you are ready to breathe out feel your shoulder blades sliding down towards the middle of your back creating a 'V' shape — you should feel your spine start to lengthen and your chest and head feel as if they are pulling away from the floor. As you breathe in return to the start position. While performing this exercise try not to push down into the floor with your arms and imagine you are holding a soft peach between your chin and chest — this helps to keep the back of the neck long.

This is a brilliant postural exercise which will keep us upright and keep our full length through the spine.





Now onto your Back

Lie on your back, with your legs bent, and feet hip distance apart. You should have a small space below your back.

Finally we will perform a pelvic tilt in order to find and become acquainted with our neutral spine position — the used neutral spine as a reference point.

Rock your pelvis forwards and backwards a few times. Use your hands initially, to feel the movement as your pelvis rocks.



You should find a position where the pelvis is resting and remaining parallel to ceiling, as if you could sit a bowl of water on top of your stomach and it would be perfectly level. You have found your neutral spine position.

Now pull the belly button towards your spine without changing the position of the pelvis and maintain this recruitment and this position.



The first exercise here is a simple **Alternating Leg Lift** — take a breath in to prepare then on the out breath lift one foot away from the floor, breathe in and replace — then repeat on other leg. As you move from one foot to the other remember to keep that bowl of water perfectly balanced on top of your hip girdle. This is a foundation exercise which will help us to strengthen and build stamina in those deep abdominal core muscles and once mastered will help us to perform bigger movements to challenge our stability and to improve our overall balance with movement.



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To release our muscles we should now hug our knees into our chest — this helps to relax those deep abdominals and to stretch the spine.



That's it! Week 1 class, done and dusted. However, make sure you practise this Week 1 class regularly throughout the week, so you can prepare for the Week 2 class.

In between your structured matwork classes with one of my Pilates Instructors, you can practise these Pilates principles on a daily basis as part of your routine — standing evenly over both feet, recruiting deep abdominal muscles, breathing into the rib cage whenever you find yourself in a queue at the shop, waiting in a queue, on the phone, waiting at traffic lights in your car — make Pilates part of your lifestyle.

However, remember that those deep abdominal muscles are like any other muscle group: they need to rest, so don't think you need to recruit them 24 hours a day, but you do want to be able to use them as and when necessary, and — of course — practice makes perfect!