

Biography: Joseph Hubertus Pilates

Joseph H. Pilates was born in [Mönchengladbach](#) in Germany, in 1880. His father, a prize-winning [gymnast](#), had [Greek](#) origins; his [German](#) mother worked as a [naturopath](#).^[1] The family originally spelled their surname in the Greek manner as "Pilatu" but changed to using "Pilates". This caused Joseph Pilates much grief because, as a child, older boys taunted him calling him "[Pontius Pilate](#), killer of [Christ](#)". A sickly child who suffered from [asthma](#), [rickets](#) and [rheumatic fever](#), he dedicated his entire life to improving his physical strength. Joe began studying [body-building](#), [yoga](#) and [gymnastics](#), and by the age of 14 was fit enough to pose for [anatomical](#) charts. He came to believe that the "modern" [life-style](#), bad [posture](#), and inefficient breathing lay at the roots of poor health. He ultimately devised a series of [exercises](#) and training-techniques and engineered all the equipment, specifications and tuning required to teach his methods properly.

In 1912 Pilates moved to England, earning a living as a [boxer](#), [circus](#)-performer and [self-defense](#) trainer. During [World War I](#) the British authorities interned him with other German citizens in a camp in the Isle of Man, where he trained other inmates in fitness and exercises. Here the beginnings of the Pilates Method began to take shape.

About 1925 Pilates migrated to the [United States of America](#).^[2] On the ship to America he met his future wife Clara. The couple founded a studio in [New York City](#) and directly taught and supervised their students well into the 1960s. His method, which he and Clara originally called "Contrology", related to encouraging the use of the [mind](#) to control [muscles](#). It focuses attention on core [postural](#) muscles that help keep the human body balanced and provide support for the [spine](#). In particular, Pilates exercises teach awareness of [breath](#) and of alignment of the spine, and strengthen the deep [torso](#) and abdominal muscles.

Joseph and Clara Pilates soon established a devout following in the local dance and the performing-arts community of New York. Well-known dancers such as [George Balanchine](#) (who arrived in the United States in 1933) and [Martha Graham](#) (who had come to New York in 1923) became devotees and regularly sent their students to the Pilates for training and rehabilitation.

Joseph Pilates wrote several books, including [Return to Life through Contrology](#) and [Your Health](#) and was a prolific inventor with over 26 patents cited^[3]. Joe and Clara had a number of disciples who continued to teach variations of his method or in some cases focused exclusively on preserving the method and the instructor-training techniques they learned during their studies with Joe and Clara.

Joseph Pilates died in 1967 at the age of 87 in New York.

Publications:

- Joseph Hubertus Pilates; William John Miller (1960). [Return to Life Through Contrology](#). Christopher Pub. House.
- *Your Health* by Joseph H. Pilates (1934)
- *Return to Life Through Contrology* by Joseph H. Pilates and William J. Miller (1945)

Disciples

The original direct disciples of Joseph "Joe" Pilates included:

- [Romana Kryzanowska](#)
 - [Jay Grimes](#)
 - [Eve Gentry](#)
 - [Ron Fletcher](#)
 - [M. Buckingham](#)
 - [Corola Trier](#)
 - [Mary Bowen](#)
 - [Kathy Grant](#)
 - [Lolita San Miguel](#)
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- [Romana's Pilates](#), official website of Romana Kryzanowska
 - [Ron Fletcher Work](#), official website of Ron Fletcher
 - [Mary Bowen's Pilates](#), official website of Mary Bowen
 - [Kathy Grant's Pilates](#), official website of Kathy Grant
 - [Lolita's Pilates](#), official website of Lolita San Miguel

References

1. [^ Joseph Pilates, Life and Biography](#)
2. [^ Joseph Pilates, Life and Biography](#)
3. [^ Patents: Pilates Joseph H](#)