

PILATES FOR A STRONGER SELF

by: Sarah Dann

When I started taking Pilates back in the fall, I had virtually no idea about what Pilates actually was. I was pretty sure it was based on stretching but I literally knew nothing specific and showed up to the first class unsure about what to wear, whether I needed shoes or not, the works, I was a Pilates virgin. Now, four months later, I'm an advocate and I understand why my masseuse told me that Pilates had changed her life – it might be on the way to changing mine as well.

That's because, Pilates gives you overall body strength that comes naturally to many in the first many years of life. I was lucky and held on to my athleticism and core strength right into my early thirties. I thought that those who said to me, "it will catch up to you," were just catty, and, while they may have been to some extent, they also proved to be right. By mid last year, I was feeling out of shape, a little more malleable than I liked and not myself. I decided to do something about it.

Two classes a week at The Pilates Barr have gently but surely whipped me into shape. Pilates is a subtle workout – not the sort that makes you feel you're having a near-death experience but more the sort that makes you feel you've had a life-affirming experience. I literally leave the classes refreshed and stronger with my chin held high and the overall feeling that I'm doing something really good for my self. In only a few short months, I am stronger, in better shape literally and physically (ie. I've toned up) and mentally its been a really satisfying experience as well.

And all this from an unassuming hour on a mat. The Pilates Barr is a really great place in that they take a progressive approach to instruction and allow you to experience classes led by several instructors, each of whom has their own style and approach but each of whom follows the basics, the basics of Pilates. There are several levels – I started at beginner last session but have moved up to Level Two for this one. You do gradually take on harder and harder tasks which also reinforce not just your physical being but also your sense of accomplishment – you see and feel results.

Pilates follows some very basic principles, core muscles are emphasized and specific movements are repeated in tandem with deep breathing, to stretch and strengthen muscle groups. The beauty of it seems to be the infinite number of combinations in which you can work different muscles so that no two classes are ever the same and your body can continue to evolve as long as you participate in Pilates. At The Pilates Barr, this is due in part to the combination of work on a mat, on a roller, using a wall bar, on an inflated exercise ball representing cushion for balance, and using smaller ball-shaped weights. All these accentuate the movement in play and therefore the muscles in play for an infinite number of exercises not experienced at all studios.

If you're feeling a little less than yourself and are looking for a way to bring yourself back to feeling more yourself, I strongly recommend that you give Pilates a try to see if its right for you. The Pilates Barr still has some room in its current classes and is located at Birchcliff and Kingston Road. They can be visited online at www.thepilates-barr.ca or you can call 647 285 1485. Call today to see if there is a class time that suits your schedule. If you do, you could be feeling fit by spring and all toned up for summer. See you there.