



## Teens Too Tight.... Terrible!

One Autumn a couple of years ago I was riding my bike behind my 11 year old daughter's, and noticed she was sitting with her pelvis off to the right side of the saddle. When asked, she said the saddle wasn't hurting her, and because it was the end on the season and we didn't ride again, I forgot about it.

Last summer, though, Kylie was watching me do Pilates. Fascinated, she asked, "How do you do that?"  
"What?"  
"Touch your toes". Hmmmm.

Kylie proceeded to show me how she was unable to reach any closer to her feet than her shins, and our bike ride all came back to me in a flash. Ky was twisted in the saddle because of tight hamstring muscles, and it was already effecting her growing spine.

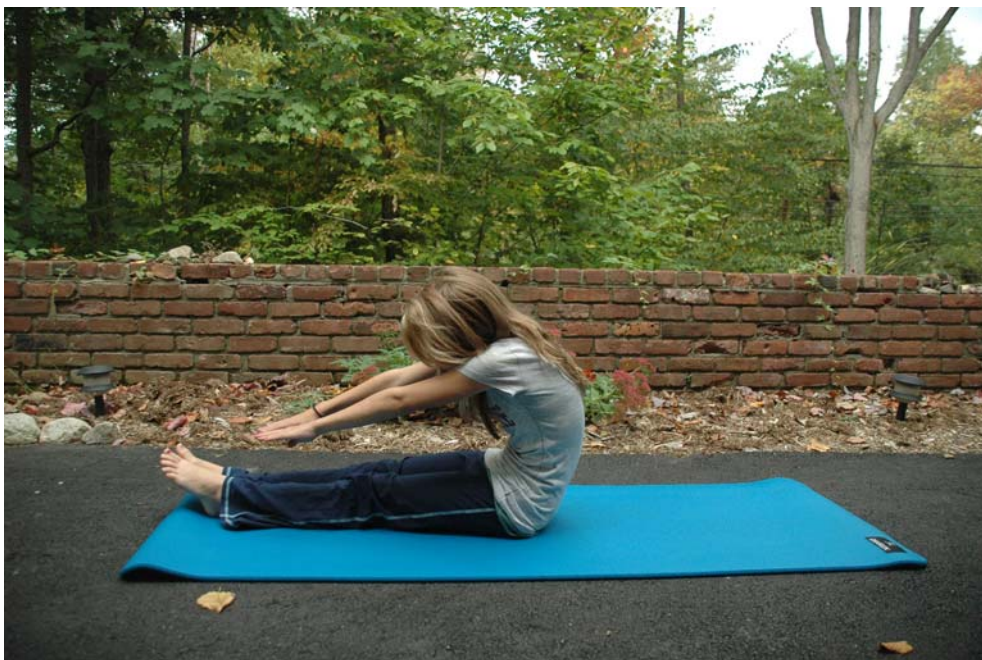
Back in the 60's, when I was in grade school, physical fitness was part of the curriculum, and cartoons were only offered on Saturday mornings, so when we were out of school we spent very little time sitting in front of a television; we were out riding bikes, building forts, rolling down slopes in cardboard boxes. Activity was physical fun, not some odious chore to interrupt a videogame. Today, McDonald's and cola is served in the schools, and because of the rising costs of insurance, Phys-Ed is offered only in token amounts. Kids get their activity mainly from enrolling in after-school sports, if that.

Considering how different our children's lifestyles, activity levels and eating habits are now from 40 years ago, these statistics released by the Pilates Method alliance last year shouldn't, but do, shock us:

- Only 24% of California’s 5th, 7th, & 9th graders met minimum physical fitness standards last year.
- National Center for Health Statistics 2001: 13% of children ages 6-11 and 14% of Adolescents 12-19 were overweight, whereas from 1971-1974 the numbers were 4 and 6 %, respectively.
- HHS News 2002: from 1979-2000, health care costs from obesity related conditions in youths ages 6-17 increased from \$35 million to \$127 million in 2001 dollars.
- Type 2 diabetes, once called “Adult Onset” Diabetes, and high blood pressure, once thought to be age related, are now frequently being diagnosed in children and teens.

My daughter, thankfully, has always been active. She was running in races held by the Road Runner’s Club since she was 4, and is actively involved in soccer and dance. But with all that, at age 8, she couldn’t touch her toes.

I began to notice that tendency all around me. My daughter’s team-mates were injuring, and re-injuring themselves from tight, locked joints. A Pilates client of mine said his very athletic teen son’s hip had been hurting and he’d been limping. When I evaluated him, he only had about 30 degree hip flexion, (which means that on the way to trying to touch his toes, he could only reach about the top of his thighs. He’s 12.



There has been an initiative to get Pilates in the schools. One recent study involving Pilates being brought into 2 elementary schools in California found that over a short period of time, balance improved an average of 70%, Push-up holding strength improved 32%, and the most significant point: of forward bend ability findings is that **96.4% of the students who participated in the program were able to bend forward and touch their fin-**

ger tips to the floor or greater as compared to the pre-program findings which indicated that only 35% of the students were able to do this.

Simple, fundamental exercises, such as the “Spine Stretch Forward”, were taught to the children, reinforcing spinal alignment and learning how to find the deep powerhouse muscles to initiate the forward reach.



Imagery helped make the exercises accessible to both the younger and older children, such as “strand of pearls” on the Roll-Up, and “ladybug becomes a grasshopper” in Double Leg Stretch.

One part of the study that I wasn’t looking for was how the children reported feeling more relaxed and less stressed. I knew of the statistics of how physical activity is consistently related to higher levels of self-esteem and self-concept and lower levels of anxiety and stress, but I had never really thought of that being an issue for children. It makes sense, though when you think about it. If kid’s aren’t physically blowing off steam the way they use to, it must come as a revelation to them to feel so much better emotionally after doing Pilates.

Here in town, one local teen, Kimberly, reports feeling much stronger since she’s joined a class. But beyond that, from a young lady who thought she hated exercise to one that never misses a lesson, the strength she seems to be developing is more than just the physical, which is a wonderful thing to witness and be a part of.

**Coming Soon: Teen Pilates. Call 973-962-1327 for more info. Also...Free Intro to Teen Pilates @ Ringwood Library, 1/30/08, 7pm**

**Contacts and Credits:**

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Please go to my website, <http://www.WholePilates.com> to see what I’ve been working on, or to get the link for the Biofeedback game.

To install Adobe Acrobat, go to: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

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