

FROM THE GROUND UP

While recovering from a hip replacement, Pilates teacher Jeff Woodman experienced a newfound disconnect between his feet and the ground. Here's how he was able to reestablish a sense of groundedness, honing precision and flow along the way, to return to health and vitality.

By Jeff Woodman • Edited by Amanda Altman

FOLLOWING MY SECOND HIP REPLACEMENT IN 2015, I WAS STRUGGLING TO REGAIN HIP FUNCTION AND CONNECTION THROUGH MY FEET TO THE GROUND. Through a suggestion from my friend and colleague, Gary Calderone—author of *The Pilates Path to Health: Body, Mind, and Spirit*, who also studied Wendy LeBlanc Arbuckle's 3Core Connections: Embodied Perspective in depth—Gary and I began working together.

I discovered that the relationships from my shoulder blades to my pelvis to the tripod of my feet were seriously compromised. Through Gary's experiential work, I was able to get grounded and free my body in order to regain the vitality I was seeking.

During my years of teaching Pilates, I have found that, although breathing is the foundation of the work, it can also be the most difficult aspect to master. Through the use of mudras (hand positions), lung capacity is increased normally and naturally, providing a template for powerful, traditional Pilates breathing, which is a prerequisite for achieving whole-body movement.

These exercises on the Low Chair, which I've chosen because of its small surface area, require grounded dynamic stability. The goal is to attain flowing movement, precision and control through grounding and breath.

And in case you were wondering, yes, both of my hips have been completely rehabbed, something I credit to doing Pilates in this way.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

PROP Moon Box

BREATH Varies

REPS Varies

TIP Do this sequence four times a week for optimal results.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN COX; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JESSICA CHYNOWETH; JEFF'S OWN CLOTHES



MAT

MUDRA BREATHING

DO THIS TO

- Bring awareness to the breath.
- Increase lung capacity.

START Sit on a chair with your feet firmly grounded on the floor.

MOVE For the following mudras (hand positions), inhale and exhale deeply through your nose for 5–8 breaths:

CHIN MUDRA (LOWER-CHEST BREATHING)

Join your index fingers to your thumbs, forming two circles, keeping your other three fingers straight and parallel with your palms on your upper thighs.

CHINMAYA MUDRA (MIDCHEST BREATHING)

Join your index fingers to your thumbs, forming two circles. Curl your other fingers into your palms with your palms on your upper thighs.

ADHI MUDRA (UPPER-CHEST BREATHING)

Close all your fingers over your thumbs into fists, palms on your upper thighs.

BRAHMA MUDRA (COMPLETE BREATHING)

Keep both hands in fists as in Adhi Mudra, joining your knuckles at your navel, palms facing up.

TIP Focus on feeling your breath in each area of your lungs.



ADHI MUDRA

CHIN MUDRA



CHINMAYA MUDRA



ADHI MUDRA



BRAHMA MUDRA



MUDRA PHOTOS BY BIGSTOCK

LOW CHAIR

STANDING PUSH-DOWN FRONT

APPARATUS SETTING 2 springs (high front, low rear)

DO THIS TO

- Increase pelvic awareness and movement while grounding the hands and feet to free the joints.
- Promote spinal articulation through the awareness of the hands and feet.
- Work on extension and flexion in the hip joint while grounding the supporting leg.
- Enhance balance.

START Stand with your feet parallel and hip-width apart in front of the pedal. Roll down, placing your hands shoulder-width apart on the pedal.

WITH PELVIC SHIFT

MOVE Bend one knee and then the other, noticing your pelvis move naturally. Repeat for 4 breaths, breathing naturally as you focus on stabilizing the pedal.

WITH SPINAL EXTENSION AND FLEXION

MOVE Inhale to prepare, grounding through your feet and hands; exhale as you round your spine, pressing down on the pedal. Inhale as you bend your knees and extend your spine into a flat back, bringing the pedal up; exhale as you straighten your knees, round your back and press the pedal down. Do 2 reps, then inhale to round up to start. Do 4 reps of the entire sequence.

SINGLE LEG

MOVE Exhale as you lift your left leg with a bent knee, bringing that foot to the inside of your other knee. Inhale as you ground and stabilize through your body; exhale as you round over to place your hands on the pedal. Inhale as you press down on the pedal and extend your left leg back into an arabesque with a flat back. Exhale as you return to the foot-to-knee rounded-back position, bringing the pedal up. Do 3 reps of the entire sequence. Lower your foot and roll up to standing. Repeat on your other side.

TIP Don't fall over, wink, wink.

GEAR GUIDE

Balanced Body Wunda Chair and **Moon Box Lite** (\$1,095 and \$35, respectively; pilates.com)



WITH PELVIC SHIFT

WITH SPINAL EXTENSION AND FLEXION



SINGLE LEG



SEATED MERMAID

APPARATUS SETTING 1 spring (high front, low back); Moon Box beside the Chair, on the side opposite the pedal

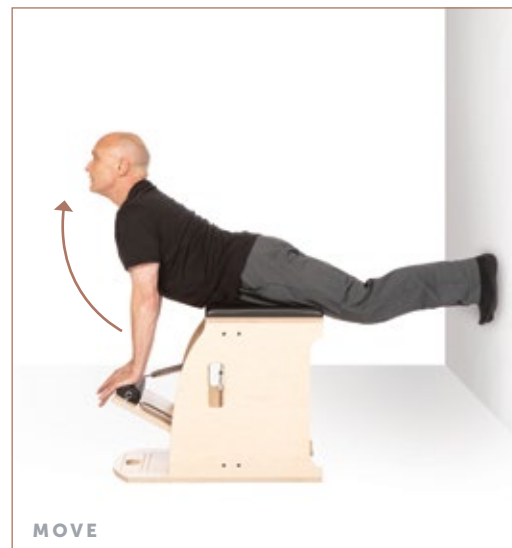
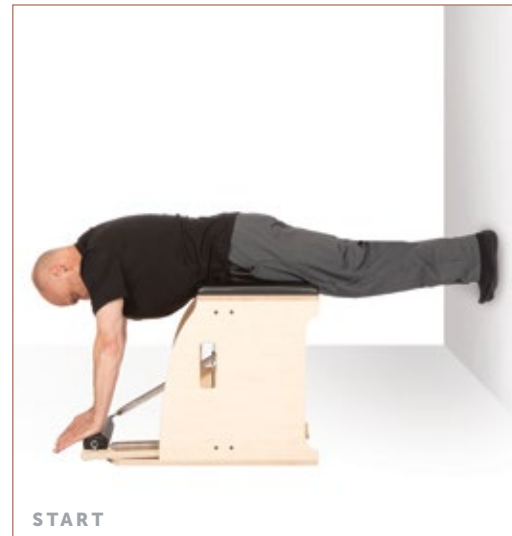
DO THIS TO

- Work on lateral spinal flexion.
- Increase pelvic stability.

START Sit on the Chair sideways to the pedal with your outer foot resting on the Moon Box. Rest both arms at your sides with your inner hand touching the pedal.

MOVE Inhale as you raise your outer arm overhead, moving your gaze with your hand. Exhale as you turn your head toward your inner hand and press down on the pedal. Inhale as you look up at your outer hand and bring the pedal up. Exhale as you lower your outer arm and your gaze. Do 3 reps of the entire sequence. Repeat on your other side. Now repeat the whole shebang with your legs extended forward.

TIP Prioritize grounding to enhance spinal mobility.



PRONE SWAN

APPARATUS SETTING 1 spring (high front, low back)

DO THIS TO

- Enhance the grounding of the hands and feet to accentuate spinal extension.

START Lie facedown on the Chair with your pelvis stable on the mat and your thoracic spine rounded. Place the heels of your hands on the pedal, pressing it down. Ground your feet into a wall behind you, slightly bending your knees to engage your hamstrings.

MOVE Inhale as you curl up to spinal extension, articulating your spine; exhale as you arch back down. Do 3–5 reps. Repeat the sequence with your feet off the wall.

TIP Feel the flow of your breath meeting the flow of your movement.

SEATED TWIST

APPARATUS SETTING

1 spring (high front, low back)

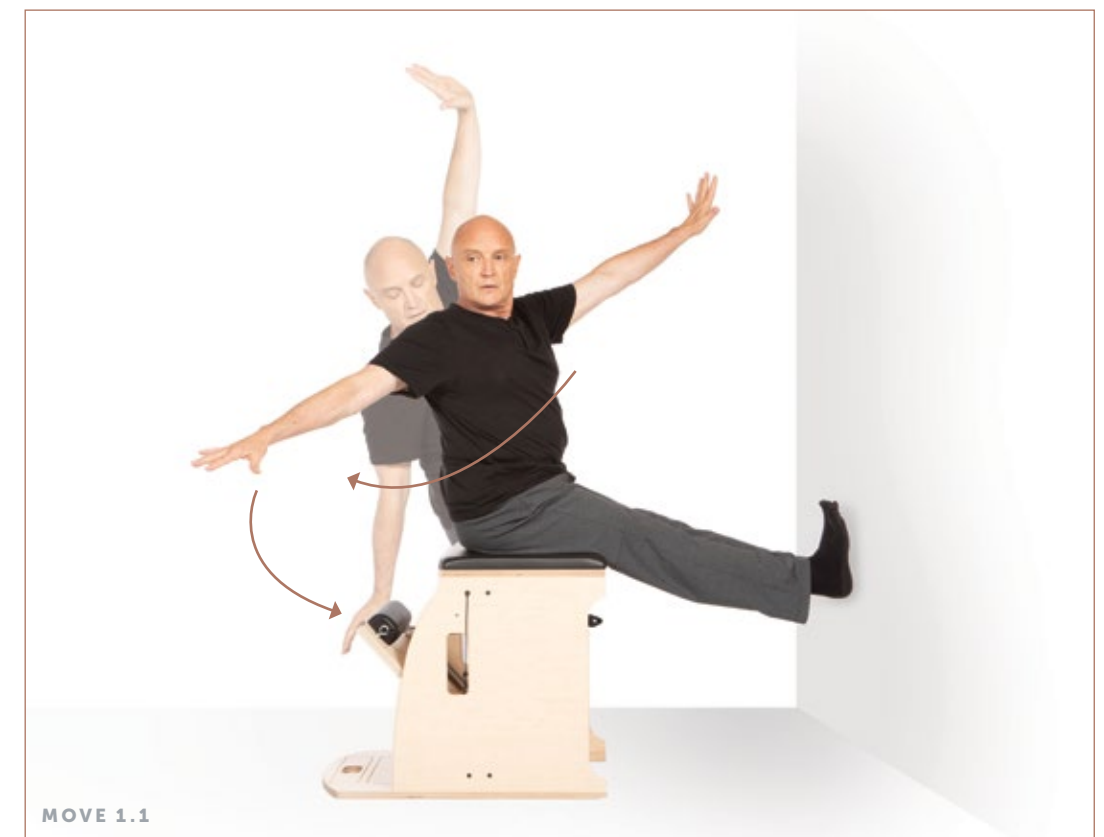
DO THIS TO

- Increase spinal rotation through the grounding of the hands and feet.

START Sit tall on the Chair with your feet grounded into a wall and your arms by your sides.

MOVE Inhale as you extend your arms to your sides at shoulder height; exhale as you twist to the right while bringing your right hand to the pedal and reaching your left arm by your ear. Inhale as you keep your wrist flexed to press down on the pedal. Exhale as you return to vertical in a twisted position. Inhale as you return to center. Repeat on your other side. Do 3 sets. Repeat the entire sequence with your feet off the wall, extended in front of you.

TIPS Stay evenly grounded through all contact points. Emphasize full spinal rotation. Feel the movement in your hip joint.



JEFF WOODMAN received his initial Pilates training from the late Romana Kryzanowska. He went on to study with Amy Taylor Alpers and Rachel Taylor Segel at the Pilates Center of Boulder in Colorado, where he completed his comprehensive teacher training, in 1994. Having taught athletics and movement for more than 40 years, Jeff began teaching and coaching swimming while in high school and his interest in dance led to a career which has included performing, choreographing, directing and teaching classical ballet. While teaching at the school of the Colorado Ballet, Jeff was introduced to the Russian method of classical ballet by the late Jürgen

Schneider and continued to study and teach this artistic and scientific method at numerous ballet schools for several years.

Jeff owns and operates the Pilates Fitness Studio in Fort Collins, CO, where he created a comprehensive teacher-training program and has had the honor of training Pilates instructors for the past 15 years. Through his study and teaching of the Pilates method, Jeff continues to discover the depth and beauty of the wonderful work of Joseph Pilates. The focus of Jeff's teaching is to help clients discover renewed function and vitality. For more information, visit pilatesfitnessfc.com.