

• The benefits of
• Pilates for our older
• clients are stunning.

ELDERLY CLIENTS

There are many physical challenges to be aware of when working with older people, says **Carrie Clark-Campbell**, Power Pilates senior teacher trainer in New York City, who works with many elderly clients. These include osteoporosis, herniated discs, spinal stenosis, high blood pressure, foot issues (many of her clients wear light sneakers to protect their feet) and arthritis. Clark-Campbell explains that the goal is a "program of maintenance, not progression."

Educate yourself

It is wise to learn as much as you can about these ailments. Consult with doctors, physical therapists and/or check out the websites of the National Osteoporosis Foundation, the Arthritis Foundation, the Mayo Clinic, AARP and the National Institutes of Health.

For instance, people with osteoporosis should avoid high-impact workouts, such as Jumpboard exercises. They should also avoid moves that involve bending forward and twisting at the waist, which can put pressure on the bones in the spine, increasing the risk of compression fractures. People with arthritis should start their sessions with moves that emphasize flexibility to warm up and improve their range of motion. Make sure clients with high blood pressure are not holding their breath, and keep springs light.

Even when they want to do more advanced exercises that they may see others doing, keep the emphasis on what they can safely do. Remind them of how much they've accomplished and then give them an exercise they can perform confidently.

Dealing with mental issues

Mental and emotional issues like dementia and Alzheimer's or depression can also affect a session. Clark-Campbell says that there is a lot more re-teaching of technique and less cueing for those clients. Depression can weigh heavily on elderly clients. Teach with a positive attitude and keep the focus on the session.

Clark-Campbell warns of the "fine line between caretaker and Pilates instructor." Clark-Campbell recalls one 87-year-old client who was constantly complaining about her 96-year-old boyfriend's health issues during her session. Clark-Campbell had to work really hard so that the session focused on her client's movement and not a therapy session about her boyfriend's issues. Allow



You may need to assist elderly clients to get up and down off the mat safely.

conversation when needed, but remember, you are there to give a positive movement experience.

Make them comfortable

Make sure there is a good place to sit to easily remove their shoes. It is often not easy for them to get up and down from the floor or just hold their balance. This also means you should try and do the matwork on the Cadillac.

When working in their home

First make sure the area is set up appropriately. Keep the television off and pets out of the room. Make sure you position yourself where you are well lit (be sure the light isn't behind you, making it difficult to see). Because there is no Cadillac at home, teach your client how to kneel to sit to the floor and get up. Be prepared to safely help your client up and down. If it's not possible to work on the floor at all, then do the matwork on her bed.

Extreme rewards

The benefits of Pilates for our older clients are stunning. Improved balance, strength, flexibility and stamina are just the start. Hearing a client say, "I can lean down and tie my shoe effortlessly" is an amazing reward.

Study more

Many continuing education programs offer workshops on elderly clients. (They're also frequently offered at conferences.) Carrie Clark-Campbell teaches one for Power Pilates. Also, Karena Thek Lineback offers full weekend workshops on osteoporosis and Pilates; get more information at osteopilates.com. Also, AARP.com offers wonderful free articles on all topics related to aging.

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Shari Berkowitz lives in New York City where she teaches Pilates sessions and workshops, designs jewelry and writes. You can learn more about her at TheVerticalWorkshop.com, or read her Pilates Teacher Blog at TheVerticalWorkshop.wordpress.com and see her jewelry at sharibjewelry.com.