

## How to Engage the Core Muscles



# Introduction

This handout is designed to show you the the basic elements of Pilates when starting your practice :)



There are 2 ways to engage your core muscles

❖ Using the Lower Tummy Muscles

❖ Using the Pelvic Floor Muscles

You will find one of the 2 ways easier, pick the way that feels easiest to you.

If you are struggling, don't worry. Focus on the movement and position to start with and these muscles will start working overtime.

## Option One

### Engaging through the Lower Tummy Muscles

Lying down on your back with your knees bent and feet hip distance apart.

Imagine a belt on a pair of hipster jeans, low down below your belly button.

Now imagine you are trying to do the belt up and you need to very slightly draw the tummy muscles in, to get the buckle done up.

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out and as you, very very slightly, draw in where the imaginary belt is.

Hold this gentle drawing in for a few breathes in and out, then fully relax.

It is important to fully relax, so we don't over work the muscles.



## Top Tips

### Things to watch for:

The whole tummy pulling in or pulling in too hard. You should only feel a slight drawing in.

A tense feeling in the middle of your upper tummy, just below your ribs. This is usually a sign you're working too hard and holding your breath.

You don't want to hold your breath. Breathe normally as you hold the position for a few seconds (10 max)

## Option Two

### Engaging through your Pelvic Floor Muscles

Your Pelvic Floor Muscles sit underneath and their job is to support the pelvic organs bladder and bowel. They help close the bladder and bowel to stop us leaking. Like any muscle they need to be strong to do their job effectively

How to get them working:

Lying down on your back with your knees bent and feet hip distance apart.

Imagine your Pelvic Floor Muscles like a hammock, sitting underneath and spanning your pelvis.

Breathe in to prepare

Breathe out and try to tighten the muscles around your back passage as if you were trying to hold in a fart (sorry, but thats the easiest way to explain it!)

Allow this tightening to spread to the front as if you are trying to stop yourself passing urine.

It should feel like a gentle drawing up and a gentle tightening inside. Don't do this too forcefully.

Breathe normally as you hold this for a few seconds (10 max) & then fully relax.

## Top Tips

### Tips for engaging using the Pelvic Floor Muscles:

You may feel the tummy gently tighten as well (as in the first exercise) this is because these muscles work together.

Sometimes it helps to imagine the Pelvic Floor as a lift. There are 2 floors and you are trying to gently draw upwards to move the lift up to the first floor.

Always fully relax in-between exercises so you don't overwork.

Breathe normally

Get used to the exercise first, holding for a few seconds and feeling the muscles relax after.

With practise you can work up to holding it for 10 seconds.

This is a great exercise to practise on its own to strengthen the Pelvic Floor Muscles.

## What a lot of People Say

*"I'm trying to engage my core but I'm not sure I'm doing it right"*

I'm with you and I don't want you get to hung up on this. These muscles are supposed to work automatically, without us even thinking about it.

So getting them to work when we want is difficult and takes practise. When we first start Pilates there is a lot to think about.

In my experience the 2 things to focus on are, breathing normally while to move and maintaining a good position of the low back and pelvis.

If you're in the right position and controlling the movements these muscles will start to kick in automatically.

After all, something has to hold you there! :)

For this reason, in the classes I am going to be focusing much more on positioning and control and don't worry because I'll guide you through.

## A Note about the Pelvic Floor

The exercise to strengthen the Pelvic Floor is a good exercise to practise on its own as it strengthens the muscles.

If you are suffering from any Pelvic Floor problems such as a vaginal prolapse or urinary incontinence then I would advise seeing a Specialist Physiotherapist for an assessment and individual advice.