

GYROTONIC

GET ON BOARD THE GYRATION GENERATION!

There is no question that first yoga, Pilates and now, Gyrotonic, have taken over the weekly workouts of many fitness buffs. Think of exercise junkies like Madonna, statuesque beauties like Nicole Kidman and spiritual gurus like Gwyneth Paltrow, and there is an easily discernable pattern: they forego the heavy workouts many of us have been doing since the 1980s, in favour of more holistic approaches to fitness. Our girls are hanging up the aerobics leotards (except Madonna, that is!) and snuggling into a comfortable set of trackies for exercises that focus on strength, flexibility and concentrating on the 'powerhouse' of the body, the area composed of the abdomen and lower back. Into the picture comes Gyrotonic, the next generation of Pilates, which has similar principles to the latter but is a three-dimensional, circular system that derives influences from yoga, swimming, Tai-Chi and dance, and also works with the Oriental belief in energy paths. Breathing is used to open closed areas of the body and movements are designed to increase the flexibility and strength of joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments.

Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis (the floorwork version of Gyrotonic) were developed by Juliu Horvath, a former dancer with the New York City Opera whose career came to a sudden end when he suffered spinal disc injuries and ruptured an Achilles tendon. Horvath retired to the Virgin Islands, where he delved into yoga, acupuncture and meditation. Horvath developed Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis, which he called 'The Art of Exercising and Beyond', the 'beyond' element referring to balancing the body's seven chakras.

GYROKINESIS, ALSO CALLED YOGA FOR DANCERS, HAS THE FOLLOWING MAIN PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Balancing the energy systems and oppos-

ing forces in the body.

- ▶ Coordinating breathing and movement, visualising the flow of energy as one exercises.
- ▶ 'Opening up' or creating spaces in the joints.
- ▶ Moving the spine in nine different ways.
- ▶ Using circular/twisting/spiralling rather than the straight, linear motions used in Pilates.

GYROKINESIS MOVEMENTS INCLUDE

- ▶ Forward flexion and extension, which involves bending the spine forward and backward.
- ▶ Moving your ribcage to the right and left while keeping the lower body steady.
- ▶ Bending to the right and left side, feeling the strength flow from your pelvis to your outstretched arm.
- ▶ Rotating to the right and left, turning to look over your right or left shoulder.
- ▶ A combination of the above.

A typical class begins with a 20-minute warm-up, performed sitting on a stool or chair, to release tight, stressed muscles. The instructor leads you through a series of exercises involving self-massage, rhythmical rocking, twisting and spiralling exercises and breathing techniques designed to release the body of toxins and negative energies. This is followed by some floorwork for the hamstrings and lower back, involving a series of rhythmical rocking exercises with the legs extended. Next up are the hips, which are 'opened' by exercises performed in three directions: forward and back, side to side and spiralling/twisting, benefiting the spine, pelvis, hips and hamstrings.

When the body is freed or opened up, the class proceeds to back- then stomach- strengthening exercises. Back exercises are performed



lying on the stomach, lifting arms and legs off the floor, using rocking motions of various intensity. The next target is the abdominal wall, which is strengthened by curling the upper torso towards the ceiling and moving the legs in arcs, without straining the lower back. Side-to-side and circular exercises for the abdomen are also performed. The last exercises in the class are performed standing, focusing on balance and stamina and the 'cool down' phase involves breathing and/or meditation.

The Gyrotonic machine, also invented by Juliu Horvath, provides an external support system for Gyrokinesis moves. Unlike Pilates machinery, which involves finding 'the shortest distance between two points', the Gyrotonic uses a series of pulleys with weighted resistance and exercises involve circularly moving its handles. For hamstring workouts, feet are placed in straps, abdominal exercises become more challenging thanks to the use of pulleys, and there is back support for exercises aimed at releasing the chest area. While the feel of Gyrokinesis and the Gyrotonic machine is somewhat different from Pilates, in many ways the aim is the same: to increase the body's strength to its maximum potential.

If you are inspired to have a first go at Gyrokinesis and the Gyrotonic, Dominika Doleschal of Dominika Pilates has certified Gyrotonic equipment at her studio, having worked and trained alongside Juliu Horvath himself, making frequent trips to New York to Joseph Pilates' school to make sure she is up-to-date. Dominika is the kind of professional you should approach if you are keen on savouring the real thing; an authentic guide to a sense of greater strength, well-being and ensuing happiness.

CONTACT ▣

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