

# Contrology Pilates Physical Culture

Volume II

## THE MAT

*Esperanza Aparicio Romero - Javier Pérez Pont*





*Colección Contrology Pilates Physical Culture (7 Volumes)*

*Volume 2: The Mat*

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To Manuel Aparicio,  
my dearest and adored father  
Esperanza Aparicio Romero and Javier Pérez Pont

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank our parents and all the relatives who have supported our projects all these years, above all Manolo, Esperanza's father, who, day after day, before he left us, helped us and contributed untiringly and with special care to make our dreams come true.

Esperanza Aparicio Romero and Javier Pérez Pont

# A FOREWORD

Our purpose for this book is to provide you with a directory of exercises, a specific order, and detailed recommendations and tips that allow you to enjoy Contrology as a tool of body development at home, in case you cannot attend a studio or wish to complement your private sessions. It is always highly advisable to have a teacher following your individual program.

The key to Contrology lies in developing and strengthening the “powerhouse”. You should start on this adventure with a predisposition for improvement, a positive attitude and an unwavering will.

The importance of the instructions and details given for each exercise could be summarized in this sentence by Pilates himself: “the development of the small muscles has an effect on the development of the bigger ones. As small bricks are used to build great buildings, thus each muscle has a role in the development of the muscle system as a whole”.

Find time to be alone, exercise is more pleasant and beneficial when mind and body are connected. Concentrating for some moments on centre, control, precision, flow and breathing is much more effective to reach a feeling of well-being and an increase in our self-esteem through practice than trying to achieve a specific result.

Take each movement to the limit of your ability, but not beyond, use your common sense and remember you must be in control at all times.

Introduce new exercises gradually, without rushing, don't forget that Contrology, as presented in these books, is the result of a lifetime of research and for it to have sense and to reach optimal results, the book's guidelines must be followed. Perform each exercise slowly but diligently, learning each one thoroughly before proceeding to the next one, until you can do the whole Basic System series of exercises to the smallest detail, and without having to look at the book. Doing an exercise without understanding the required conditions is ineffectual. At the beginning, it is normal to forget some small details. Even when you believe you know how to perform an exercise, there is still room for improvement if you review the instructions.

It will then be the moment to settle on doing all the Basic System series three times a week, day in, day out. When you can do this with a certain ease and flow, it will be the time to start introducing new exercises, one by one and in the proper order, no more than two new exercises per day and never doing more repetitions than indicated.

If you are a beginner, you should start on the mat, at home, for no more than fifteen minutes a day; and then gradually introduce longer mat exercises, never exercising for more than 45 or, at the most, 60 minutes.

You can check on your progress in two ways: doing a longer session on the mat with added exercises, or improving your rhythm and pace without losing control and knowledge by doing a system in less time.

#### **• PRECAUTIONS BEFORE GETTING STARTED - WARNINGS TO THE READER**

- » Do the exercises on a mat to protect your spine.
- » If you need it, because when you lie on your back your head hangs too much and it feels uncomfortable, you can use a small pillow or a rolled towel under your nape.

- » It is advisable to wear comfortable clothes for training. Remember you also breathe through your skin. Go barefoot or use socks.
- » Avoid rich meals for at least an hour before the session.
- » Patience, perseverance and constancy will be the best companions for your progress.
- » It must be born in mind that doing the exercises of the advanced system requires you to have a “strong powerhouse” and NOT to suffer from any acute pain or injure.
- » Work in silence so you can listen to your needs, difficulties and progress.

#### • NOSE BREATHING

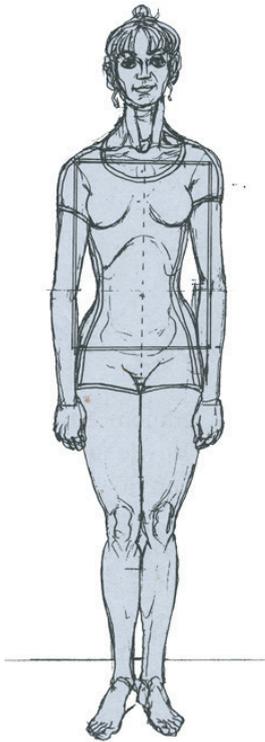
The nose filters, hydrates and directs the air towards the lungs, it warms the air, gives us the sense of smell, brings oxygen, creates mucus, drains the sinuses and affects the nervous system. Breathing and mind are interrelated; if you hold your breath, your mind will be alerted, if breathing is irregular, your mind loses focus. Being in command of our breathing makes our minds stronger and enhances concentration.

Joe Pilates used to say that “to breathe correctly, one must inhale deeply and then exhale all the air from the lungs as if wringing a soaked towel”.

# KEY CONCEPTS

- “V” FEET POSITION

A person’s posture reflects his or her attitude in life, and tensions are the result of not standing correctly. Generally, a person with a good posture can stand easily and with grace, without exaggerating any spine curve and holding head, box and legs in balance, and correctly aligned. There is an axis resting on a solid base, effortlessly resting on a vertical and with a straight, balanced and contained attitude. In a V feet position you must feel stretched and tall, but not rigid, with your weight distributed among your two feet, and the feet in a V position, hence the name, heels together and toes apart (the angle depends on the person). Legs must be pressed together, as if zipping them up from the heels.



Your legs should be slightly stretched, with relaxed muscles, your abdomen slightly pulled in and your back comfortably straight and stretched, with your weight distributed as equally as possible, neither too forward not too backwards. Admittedly, a person’s posture depends on his or her age, job, constitution and health. Correcting the posture is very important, since it is the best way to start activating the “powerhouse” for it to support correctly the weight of the spine.

When you are standing with your lower spine arched the front bones of your pelvis fall far too low; you must pull your belly inwards and upwards, orientate your coccyx downwards and lift the front bones in your pelvis, while gently elongating your spine. Be careful your head is correctly balanced, so that it can move freely on top of your nape without shortening spine length.

#### • **CENTRAL LINE AND “BOX”**

The central line is a line that cuts the body in two halves, and that Contrology takes as its centre. We can draw two more lines from shoulder to shoulder and from hip to hip, perpendicular to the central line. The intersection of these lines with two more lines which, parallel to the central one, join shoulder and hip on each side, are the limits of what we call the “box”. The “box” is a reference for the rest of the body and its correct alignment. By taking these lines as a reference, you can find out if you lean or move towards one side only. Be aware of it and correct any wrong alignment of the “box”.

Working on each of the method’s exercise inside the “box” frame guarantees a proper alignment and the control of arms and legs.

#### • **NAVEL TO SPINE: “INWARDS AND UPWARDS”**

The expression “neutral spine” is very common. It refers to the position in which the spine maintains its natural curvatures; this can be easily observed when standing, but when a body lies down and is affected by gravity, a proper spine position is more difficult to obtain. This concept is NOT part of the genuine original technique.

There are two common mistakes that must be avoided; one is over-pulling and it implies balancing the pelvis so that the lower part rises and the upper part points downwards. In those Contrology exercises which require keeping the back flat on the mat, buttocks should not be lifted because this causes tension on the thighs.

The second mistake is arching, and it happens when abdominal muscles are not strong enough to support a correct position and the column is arched, freeing abdominal muscle outwards and shortening the muscles in the lower back. Both positions, over-pulling and arching, are incorrect. To obtain an adequate alignment you only need to extend your spine on the mat and concentrate in feeling the whole back on the ground, going for the smallest space as possible between your belly and your back, but without moving or balancing your pelvis, and lengthening the lumbar section of the spine. Practice pulling your navel towards your spine while you keep breathing without allowing your stomach to go out.

#### • CHIN TO CHEST

In those exercises requiring you to lie down with your body flat on the mat and with lifted head and limbs, the position of the head contributes majorly to eliminate tension in the neck and to concentrate on the “powerhouse”.

The weight of the head is taken towards the chest, by lowering the chin and curling the neck vertebra. If the chin is too low and presses the throat, the position, apart from uncomfortable, is incorrect, even though weighing your head down backwards would tense your neck and create wrong spine alignment. Take your head towards your chest but leaving some space under your chin, and look towards your navel to guarantee and favor concentrating on your “powerhouse”.

#### • SPINE ARTICULATION VERTEBRA BY VERTEBRA

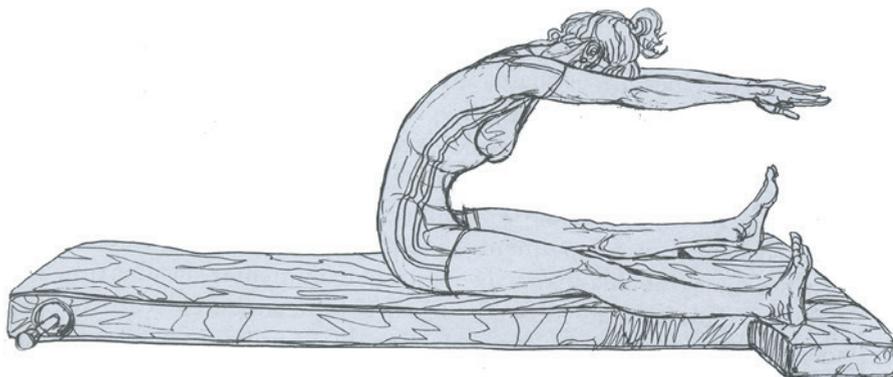
Our spine is made of several small bones (vertebrae) that can be moved in order to improve posture, be more stretched and even get taller. Whichever Contrology exercise you may be doing, you must never do brusque or sudden back movements. H. Joseph Pilates disliked seeing people do sudden movements with their backs and always pointed out that the body must be moved up and down smoothly and gradually, as if the spine was curling like a huge wheel, one vertebra at a time. Even if it takes you some time to master this, in the end it will strengthen your back and help you avoid future problems.

This concept is especially applicable to the movements which resemble those called “squats” in gymnastics.

Articulating your spine vertebra by vertebra requires you to work on the full spine, moving and separating each small bone, and trying to curl the box when going up to then uncurl it. When doing this, you may feel resistance in some areas; these rigid points must be worked upon and oxygenated to improve openness and flexibility. If you cannot curl your spine fully, do your best and use your hands in the resisting areas to go on to the rest of your box. Imagine you are growing while each bone is stretched over the last one and do it when curling or uncurling. Doing this in both directions also helps cleansing the lungs, since it makes us exhale corrupt air to inhale clean air.

- **“C”-CURVE**

Contrology does not seek a flat stomach. Using the “powerhouse”, abdominal muscles are developed so that they do their proper function and hold the box by protecting and keeping the spine flexible. We have already mentioned the “navel to spine, upwards and inwards” idea, which is also applicable when we pull the belly inwards and upwards, thus making a concavity shaped like a “C”, that creates more space between the waist and the hips for the inner organs.



**EXERCISES ON**

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# **THE MAT**



# EXERCISE GUIDELINES

Table of Systems, Reps and Exercise Order

- **BASIC SYSTEM**

- » The Hundred - 10 series of 10 reps
- » Roll Up - 3 to 5 reps
- » One Leg Circles - 5 reps in each direction
- » Rolling Like a Ball - 6 reps
- » Single Leg Stretch - 5 to 10 series
- » Double Leg Stretch - 5 to 10 series
- » Spine Stretch Forward - 3 to 5 reps

- **INTERMEDIATE SYSTEM**

- » The Hundred
- » Roll Up
- » One Leg Circles

- » Rolling Like a Ball
- » Series of Five:
  - \* Single Leg Stretch
  - \* Double Leg Stretch
  - \* Single Straight Leg - 5 to 10 series
  - \* Double Straight Leg - 5 to 10 series
  - \* Criss-Cross - 0 to 3 series
- » Spine Stretch Forward
- » Open Leg Rocker - 3 to 5 reps
- » Corkscrew - 3 series
- » Saw - 2 to 3 series
- » Neck Roll - 1 series
- » Single Leg Kick - 2 to 3 series
- » Double Leg Kick - 2 series
- » Neck Pull - 3 to 5 reps
- » Side Kick Series:
  - \* Front/Back - 5 to 10 reps
  - \* Up/Down - 3 to 5 reps
  - \* Small Circles - 5 reps in each direction
- » Teaser I - 3 to 5 reps
- » Seal - 6 reps

- **ADVANCED SYSTEM**

- » The Hundred
- » Roll Up
- » Roll Over - 3 reps in each direction
- » One Leg Circles

- » Rolling Like a Ball
- » Series of Five
  - \* Single Leg Stretch
  - \* Double Leg Stretch
  - \* Single Straight Leg
  - \* Double Straight Leg
  - \* Criss-Cross
- » Spine Stretch Forward
- » Open Leg Rocker
- » Corkscrew
- » Saw
- » Swan Dive - 3 to 5 reps
- » Single Leg Kick
- » Double Leg Kick
- » Neck Pull
- » Jackknife - 3 reps
- » Spine Twist - 2 to 3 series
- » Scissors - 2 to 3 series
- » Bicycle - 2 to 3 series in each direction
- » Shoulder Bridge - 2 to 3 reps each leg
- » Side Kick Series
  - \* Bicycle - 3 reps each direction
  - \* Circling the Inner Thighs - 5 circles each direction
  - \* Hot Potato - 1 series
  - \* Leg Lifts - 3 and hold 3 x
  - \* Leg Beats - 1 rep, beat 5 times

- \* Big Scissors - 6 reps
- \* Big Circle - 2 to 3 reps each direction
- » Teaser I, II, III - 3 reps each
- » Boomerang I and II - 2 to 4 reps
- » Hip Circles - 2 to 3 series
- » Swimming - 1 to 2 series 10 reps
- » Leg Pull Down - 2 to 3 series
- » Leg Pull Up - 2 to 3 series
- » Kneeling Side Kicks Front/Back - 3 reps
- » Mermaid - 2 to 3 reps to each side
- » Push Up - 1 to 3 series of 3 reps
- » Seal

THE MAT

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# BASIC SYSTEM EXERCISES



# I – THE HUNDRED

**TECHNICAL LEVEL:** basic

**REPS:** 10 series of 10 reps

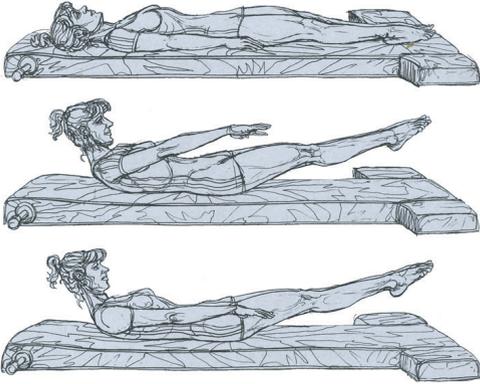
**OBJECTIVES:** stimulating blood flow, activating the “powerhouse”, improving breathing and coordination, improving resistance

## ***Starting Position***

Lie on your back, in supine, with your arms along your body and your palms down on the mat. Feel your back touching the floor completely. Stretch your toes forward, so that they are a prolongation of your legs. Bend both knees to your chest. Elongate and lift your arms keeping them parallel to the floor at some ten cm; use your “powerhouse” to shift the weight of your head to the centre of your body until you can lift your shoulders but keep the base of your shoulder blades against the mat, and stretch your legs together diagonally in front of your hips to create a 45° angle, or as far as you can manage without arching your spine. Keep pressing with the lumbar section of the spine against the mat at all times to support your spine.

## ***Movement***

Inhale slowly through your nose, lifting and lowering your outstretched arms with an energetic pumping movement for five counts. Never rest your arms on the mat. Exhale slowly



through your nose, always moving your arms for five counts again. Inhalation and exhalation (ten counts) make a series. Do nine more series. When you finish, bend your knees to your chest, lower your arms and lay your head on the mat.

### **Modification**

- » If you have just started, do The Hundred progressively: 1/ flex your knees; 2/ lift your head; 3/ stretch your legs.
- » If your lower back starts hurting, or you feel the lumbar section of the spine is separating from the mat, flex your knees to your chest and go on moving.
- » If you have delicate neck, shoulders or arms, you must modify the exercise and focus only on your breathing.
- » If your neck muscles fatigue, relax your head on the mat while you do the pumping movements with your arms. If you can, lift it again, but do not forget to do it using your “powerhouse”.
- » If you have any shoulder injury, you can move your arms gently and do narrower movements.
- » Start with forty or fifty breathings (four or five series) and slowly increase the sequence to a hundred.

### **Progression**

Starting from supine position, lift your two stretched legs from the mat to eye level, at the same time you lift your head and take your chin to your chest, always keeping the lumbar section of the spine against the mat for the whole sequence.

When you master the breathing pattern, and you are able to lower your legs at eye level, practice a shorter inhalation and a longer exhalation to improve your cardiovascular capacity (examples: inhale for four counts and exhale for six; inhale for three counts and exhale for seven...)

### ***To Bear in Mind***

- » Do not lift your box from the mat beyond your shoulder blades.
- » If you suffer any infectious illness, you must completely skip The Hundred.
- » Keep your back firmly “anchored” on the mat, taking your navel to your spine. Look towards your navel. Do not let the movement of your arms transmit to the rest of your body; it must remain completely still.
- » If you are unable of keeping your back flat on the mat with your legs at eye level, you must lift your legs only as far up as they allow you to keep your back flat.
- » Pressing your buttocks while you twist your inner upper thighs and press your legs together will make your lower back more stable.
- » Keep your fingers together and stretched and do not bend your wrists while you are pumping with your arms.

### ***Transition***

Bend your knees to your chest and stretch both legs together, in “V” feet position on the mat, to get ready for the next exercise, Roll Up.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Esperanza Aparicio Romero and Javier Pérez Pont have worked as professional dancers for more than fifteen years, as soloists and leading dancers in several European companies.

In 1995 they discover Contrology, after training as Contrology teachers with the legendary Romana Kryzanowska and Sari Mejía Santo in New York. They remain for some time with their two teachers with the aim of perfecting their knowledge, and they ultimately obtain a Level II as international trainers of the organization.

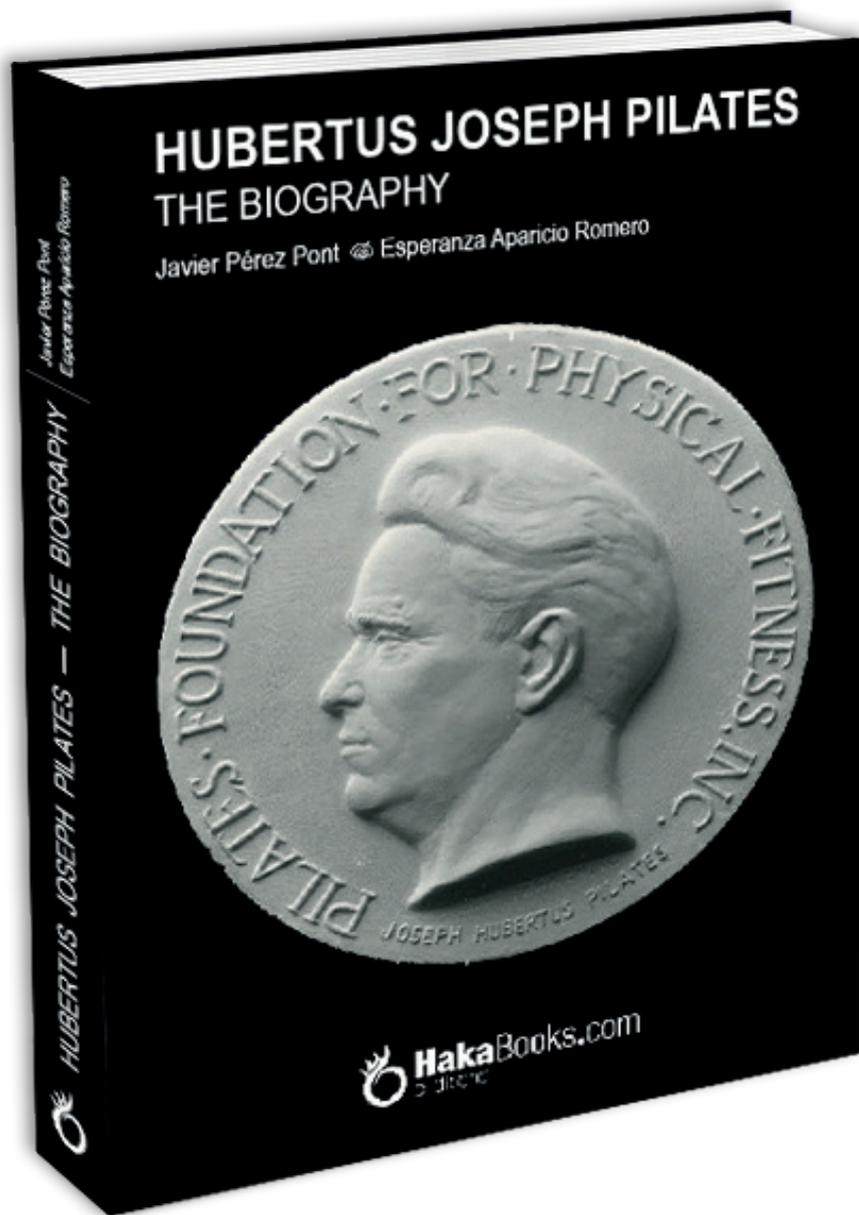
In late 1999 they decide to return to Spain and choose Barcelona as the site of what would be Barcelona's first Studio of Contrology, the first Contrology Studio in Spain to be endorsed and supported by their two teachers.

In 2002 they launch the Teacher Certification Program in Spain under the guidance of the two teachers mentioned above. During all these years, they have brought Contrology to a great number of conventions and TV and radio programs throughout Spain. Currently, and apart from managing their Studio and Teacher Certification School, they collaborate with the Romana's Pilates organization delivering international teacher-training seminars and classes.

Esperanza Aparicio and Javier Pérez Pont have published, in 2005, the first book about the method ever written by a Spanish author, under the title *El Auténtico Método Pilates, El Arte del Control* (The Authentic Pilates Method, The Art of Control) published by Martínez Roca, a part of the Grupo Planeta publishing house. The book has been a success, not only in Spain but also all over the Spanish-speaking American countries. It has also been translated into Portuguese.

And finally, they have just finished, after long years of research, the first and only biography to date of Hubertus Joseph Pilates. This biography is based on many oral testimonies, and also on official, historical and personal documents of Pilates himself. Under the title *Hubertus Joseph Pilates. La Biografía* (Hubertus Joseph Pilates. The Biography), this book will doubtlessly be a turning point on what has been believed to be true so far. The book has been published in three languages, Spanish, English and Italian.

<http://www.romanaspilates.com>.



For the first time ever we have the chance to find out the truth about Joseph Pilates.

A Book that will dispel the false myths concerning this historical figure, bring us closer to who Joe really was and what his Contrology meant.