

Mat Pilates vs Reformer Pilates

Mat Pilates uses your body weight on the floor. Reformer Pilates uses a sliding carriage with springs. Choose by your goals, your budget and how much guidance you want.

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Mat Pilates uses your body weight on a mat. Reformer Pilates uses a machine with a sliding carriage, springs and straps. Both come from the same method. You can start with either one.

Where Pilates comes from

Joseph Pilates developed the method in the early 20th century. He called it Contrology. He designed floor exercises and several machines. The reformer is the best-known machine. Today, studios teach the method in many styles. Some follow the classical order. Others adapt it. Ask the studio which approach it uses.

What happens in a mat class

You work on a mat on the floor. You may use small tools, such as a ring, a ball or a resistance band. The exercises train the muscles of the trunk, hips and shoulders. They also train breath, control and posture. Your body weight is the load. Gravity gives the challenge.

Mat classes are often cheaper. They need little equipment. You can also practise at home after you learn the basics.

What happens in a reformer class

A reformer has a flat platform, called the carriage. It slides on rails. Springs add resistance. You lie, sit, kneel or stand on it. You push and pull with your feet and hands.

The springs can help you or make an exercise harder. A teacher changes the spring setting to suit you. Many students say the machine gives clear feedback. If a movement is not smooth, the carriage shows it.

Reformer classes are usually small, because the studio has a fixed number of machines. Book early. Many studios use online booking.

Side by side

Mat	Reformer	---	---	---	Equipment	Mat, small tools	Reformer machine	Load
Body weight	Springs	Typical cost	Often lower	Often higher	Class size	Can be larger	Limited by machines	Home practice
Easy	Needs a machine							

Prices differ by city and studio. Check the drop-in price on each listing.

How to choose

- Choose **mat** if you want a low cost, you like to practise at home, or you want to learn the basic principles.
- Choose **reformer** if you like guided resistance, you want variety, or you are building strength with low impact.
- Choose **both** if your studio offers a pack that covers both.

Check the teacher

Pilates is not a protected name in most places. Ask about training. The National Pilates Certification Program (NPCP) runs the certification exam in the United States. The Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) is a professional association. Merrithew, which runs STOTT PILATES, and other large schools offer their own teacher courses. Read our guide on how to tell a good instructor.

Before you book

Tell the teacher about injuries, pregnancy or a recent surgery. Ask your doctor first if you have a medical condition. Wear fitted clothes so the teacher can see your alignment. Many reformer studios ask for grip socks. Read our guide on what to wear and bring.

Frequently asked questions

Which is better for a beginner, mat or reformer?

Both work. A reformer gives support from the springs, which helps many beginners feel the movement. Mat work needs more control, because there is no machine to guide you. Try one class of each.

Why is reformer Pilates more expensive?

The studio must buy and maintain the machines, and classes are often smaller. Prices vary by studio, so compare the listed drop-in price.

Do I need to be fit to start Pilates?

No. Both types offer beginner classes. Check the level in the class listing, and tell the teacher about any injury before class.

Sources

[Pilates Method Alliance](https://pilatesmethodalliance.org/) — <https://pilatesmethodalliance.org/>

[Merrithew \(STOTT PILATES\)](https://www.merrithew.com/) — <https://www.merrithew.com/>