

Joseph Pilates was born in Germany in 1880. He had a difficult youth, suffering from asthma, rickets, and rheumatic fever. To combat the effects of these ailments, he studied and learned body building, diving, skiing, and gymnastics. In 1912, Joe went to England where he earned a living initially as a boxer, circus performer, and a self defense trainer of English detectives. When World War I broke out, Joe was interned with other Germans designated as 'enemy aliens' at a camp in Lancaster. He trained other internees in his physical fitness exercises, and is widely credited with the noted fact that none of his trainees died during the influenza epidemic that killed thousands in England that year.

Returning to Germany after the war, where he continued his fitness training programs, the German government requested that he apply his training in and for the German Army. At this point, in 1926, he decided to immigrate to the United States. He met his future wife Clara on the boat trip to America and, together, they established a studio in New York City to teach and share his knowledge and fitness programs. He attracted the attention of several major dancers and dance studios, including such well-known names as Martha Graham and George Balanchine, who sent many of their own students to Pilates.

In January 1966 there was a fire in their building. Joe returned to his studio to try and save anything possible and fell through the burnt out floorboards, hanging by his hands from a beam for quite some time until rescued by the firefighters. It is assumed that this incident led to his death in October 1967, at the age of 87.

Practiced faithfully, Pilates yields numerous benefits. Increased lung capacity and circulation through deep, healthy breathing is a primary focus. Strength and flexibility, particularly of the abdomen and back muscles, coordination-both muscular and mental, are key components in an effective Pilates program. Posture, balance, and core strength are all heartily increased. Bone density and joint health improve, and many experience positive body awareness for the first time. Pilates teaches balance and control of the body, and that capacity spills over into other areas of one's life.