Fluid Yogalates

by Mary O. Wykle, Ph.D.

What do you get when you combine three of the most popular exercise programs and add water - Fluid Yogalates. The demand for classes featuring Yoga, Pilates, and Tai Chi continues to grow. For our water exercisers, we take these programs into warm, waist to chest deep water. Yoga and Pilates transition into the water following the principles and guidelines we use on land. Instead of Tai Chi we add Ai Chi to flow the poses and exercises together. Discover how they complement each other in developing strength, range of motion, balance, and relaxation when you combine the three together.

The ancient practice of yoga dates back at least 5000 years. Pilates evolved early in the twentieth century. Ai Chi came into being about fourteen years ago in Japan. All three have shared traits. Stretching and strengthening is continuous and flowing. Basic body position is stable. The breath is integral to movement in all three and the breath leads movement in a natural rhythm. All three help to change musculoskeletal imbalances you carry with you. Changes in movement qualities indicate that the mind has changed its focus in the body. Involvement in these and related disciplines leads to the awareness that your body moves because your mind moves it. When you actively direct the mind or attention to different areas of the body and initiate movement from those areas, you change the quality of movement. It is your breath awareness that permits this. Watching Fluid Yogalates is like watching a dance. The movement is flowing yet bold. Sustaining the yoga poses in the water requires strength of the torso and the legs. Pilates emphasizes core body strength. Ai Chi naturally opens and stretches our body as it slowly moves through the water.

Preparing to practice Fluid Yogalates, the instructor is better prepared if trained and certified in the land courses. The objective is to take the land techniques into the water. Anyone can recognize what poses or movements are occurring because they appear as they do on land - without the joint compression, but with the water buoyancy, resistance, and added range of motion. When first preparing to practice in the water, it is best to learn basic yoga poses, Pilates exercises, and Ai Chi movements separately. Once participants are familiar with the movements and positioning, you can begin to combine them together. The key is to determine which movements are similar in positioning. Always try to work opposing muscle groups as you blend elements from each into a flowing whole. You realize the true benefits when you move from the parts into a whole, like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together.

I begin sessions with Pilates exercises. Joseph Pilates referred to his system as Contrology meaning mind control over muscles by willing the body to move using the breath - coordination of body, mind, and spirit. Initiation of movement is from the core - primarily the abdominals and lower back muscles. He called it the Powerhouse. Pilates believed that learning to activate the core musculature (initiating movement from the abdominals pulled in while releasing back musculature) and moving in a geometric box fashion created length in the spine reducing misalignment and pain. Strength would then emanate out through the limbs. Mat Pilates begins in a horizontal, supine position on a mat enabling connections to the core musculature. In the water, begin in a seated position at the side of the pool with the back to the wall to duplicate the articulation of the spine into the mat.

Below are some Pilates exercises.

The Hundred - On the floor (mat), you begin in supine position. Knees pull in and legs extend in the air. Sinking the abdominals, chin comes towards the chest, and legs lower only as far as the back remains "cemented" to the mat.
Pumping the arms up and down about six inches, inhale on five counts and exhale on five counts until you reach 100. Relax the head to the mat and pull knees into chest. In the water, sitting against the side of the pool provides the surface to cement the back against a solid surface. Head remains erect, as arms pump up and back with the inhales and exhales to 100.

**Pull-Backs** - When Rolling Like a Ball is not possible, substitute pull-backs. Pull-backs are the same whether on land or in the water. Lean forward, lower chin toward chest, and grasp your wrists underneath your thighs. Pull against your thighs and further round the back as you exhale. Inhale and release the pull. Repeat five times.

**Single Leg Circles** - Performed supine on the mat, but in the water sit against the pool wall. Keeping the back cemented to the wall, lift the right leg and turn outwards. Moving from the hips, circle the leg starting across the body, down, outward, and up to starting position. Complete five circles in each direction and repeat with the other leg.

**Single Leg Kicks** - On the mat lie prone, supported on your forearms, shoulders relaxed away from the neck and ears. In the water, stand facing the side of the pool. Without extending the back, double kick one heel toward the buttocks by flexing the knee. Repeat the double beat kicks with the other leg. Complete five sets.

**Saw** - On the mat, sit erect with legs slightly wider than hip width apart. In the water, stand facing the side of the pool. If possible, place one leg on the gutter. If not, stand with legs hip width apart. Arms extend to the sides. Twist to one side maintaining a geometric box with the torso. Reach toward the little toe on the side opposite the arm while exhaling. Return to the start position. If the leg is on the gutter, repeat five times to one side and then switch to the other side. On the mat, or when standing, alternate sides.

Moving to yoga poses, it is best to learn them near the side of the pool. Yoga is an ancient system of poses that have been passed down through the years. Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union of the physical self with the universal spirit. Practicing yoga is a way of life that integrates the body, mind, and inner spirit. In the United States most practitioners say they practice hatha yoga, meaning a series of physical poses. There are many different styles of yoga. Learning yoga poses, I recommend starting with Iyengar which focuses on proper body alignment. You use props such as belts, blocks, blankets, walls, and even chairs to assist in attaining the correct positioning in the poses. In the water, the wall is the main prop. As confidence is achieved in performing the poses, you can move away from the wall.

Yoga poses are described below. Hold for approximately five breaths before returning to the starting position.

**Warrior II** - Standing with legs spread about four feet. Turn out the right foot and leg. Bend the knee and sink into a lunge position. Do not let the knee rotate inward. The torso remains facing forward and upright. The arms are extended. Look forward through the leading hand. Repeat to other side.

**Side Angle** - Begin in the Warrior II pose described above. The lateral bend is limited because of the water. In the water, place the forward hand on the forward thigh. Laterally bend to that side. The back arm extends in the air. Repeat to other side.

**Lean back** - Begin in the Warrior II pose described previously. Extend the back arm down the back leg and laterally bend back opening the chest upward. The forward arm extends in the air. Repeat to other side.

**Warrior I** - Stand with the legs spread about four feet. Turn one foot to the side. This will be the lead leg. The back leg turns slightly inward. Turning the body square to the side over the lead leg, bend the lead leg and extend the arms overhead with palms facing each other. Be careful not to extend the back. Repeat to other side.

**Tree** - Stand erect with feet parallel and hip width apart. Lift one foot to the inside of the other leg being careful not to place the foot against the side of the knee. Arms bend and the hands come into prayer position. Gradually extend the arms overhead. Repeat the pose on the other leg.
Ai Chi was developed around 1990 in Japan by Jun Konno and popularized in the United States by Ruth Sova. Ai Chi develops the concepts of roundness, continuity, naturalness, and slowness. You use a combination of deep breathing and slow broad movements in chest deep water with an inwardly directed focus. The circular movements create harmony in the body along with improved balance and increased range of motion. The repetition of the movements encourages relaxation and tranquility.

Below are Ai Chi movements that enable smooth transitions between poses. Ai Chi is typically formed away from the pool wall in chest deep water with the body immersed to the neck.

**Floating** - Sitting against the pool wall, Fluid Yogalates begins with floating to connect with the breath and release the back into the pool wall. The arms begin extended in front of the body. With the exhale, the arms flex down toward the legs. The arms extend upwards to the surface of the water with the inhale. Movements occur at the pace or the individual's breathing pace. Repeat five to eight times.

**Shifting** - Assuming the basic stance in the pool for Ai Chi, the right arm with the palm down horizontally adducts across the body while the weight shifts to the left side. This is the exhale. As you inhale, the right arm with palm up horizontally abducts to its start position. The left arm with the palm down horizontally adducts across the body while the weight shifts to the right side. Repeat five to eight times.

**Accepting** - Assuming the basic stance in the pool for Ai Chi, exhaling, the right arm with the palm down horizontally adducts as the body pivots to the left. Inhaling both arms horizontally abduct then horizontally adduct with the exhale. Repeat five to eight times. Return to the basic stance and repeat to the other side.

**Rounding** - Begin with the pivot performed in Accepting. As the arms horizontally abduct while exhaling, bring the back leg forward and round over bringing the hands to the ankle or lower leg of the leg that came forward.

Fluid Yogalates is gentle on the body while developing strength, balance, postural alignment, and body control. The plus of the program goes even beyond to leave each person with a center of calm. The newcomer needs to enter the program with an open mind. Practice with an experienced leader. Add music appropriate to the likes of the participants. Customize the program for your group. The possibilities are endless.

Additional movements and poses are detailed in my book, *Transitioning Yoga and Pilates Between Land and Water*. I also offer CEU workshops at ATRI events, AEA/IAFC, and upon request. More information is available at [www.mwaquatics.com](http://www.mwaquatics.com). You can contact Marv at mwykle.com. Information is also available from the Aquatic Therapy & Rehab Institute ([www.atri.org](http://www.atri.org)) or Ruth Sova at RuthSova@RuthSova.com.

Additional photos and descriptions of the Yoga, Pilates and Ai Chi exercises are available free at the Aquatic Therapy & Rehab Institute website ([www.atri.org](http://www.atri.org)) under Articles of Interest.

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**Notes:**

*AKWA - April / May 2004*

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Yogalates videos and online classes by Louise Solomon, founder of Yogalates. Streaming classes from beginner to advanced available 24/7 at Yogalates on Demand. Yoga videos and online yoga classes by Yogalates, view anywhere, anytime on any device. Unlimited Access 7 Day free trial. Begin your free trial today. Online Yoga Videos View the award winning Yogalates DVDs and hundreds of classes online. Access the complete award winning Yogalates DVD collection. Contact Yogalates Flow on Messenger. Sports & Recreation. Page Transparency See More. It is time for change, and I think FLUID really captures the essence of it, and the essence of my personality as well. Despite my numerous efforts, and trying to contact FB, I couldn't change the name of my old FB page as I have more than 200 likes. So please support me and like my new page! Events and classes coming soon! Namaste! ♥ https://www.facebook.com/fluidflowmaria?pnref=story. Fluid Flow. Yogalates - fusion of the two fitness disciplines attempts to bring together the benefits and the fluid movements of each of the individual disciplines. What is Yogalates? Yogalates is one of the latest trends in the world of fitness. A cross between yoga and Pilates, yogalates focuses mainly on the flow of movement from poses in yoga to those in Pilates. The proponents of yogalates call this amalgamation of the two most widely acclaimed fitness techniques "beautiful and surreal": read more Related Articles.