

align your spine

polestar's dav cohen and his baby arc will
straighten you out

BY HEIDI DVORAK

always a fitness enthusiast, Dav Cohen spends his leisure time cycling, mountain biking, backpacking, surfing, snowboarding and scuba diving. But the 40-year-old D.C. native's perspective on sports performance changed radically after he began teaching Pilates in 1992. "I realized that I did not know nearly enough about anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, pathology or movement to be teaching such a powerful form of movement therapy," says Cohen. "So I decided to get my master's in physical therapy at the University of Miami."

While there, he took a Polestar course taught by fellow Pilates compatriot Brent Anderson. "It was the only rehab-based Pilates training in existence with a sound scientific background and depth of understanding of the work," explains Cohen, "which was why I became interested in physical therapy in the first place."

Now, as Polestar's director of curriculum, Cohen is based at the company's Denver, CO, and Sydney, Australia, headquarters, and runs educator-training worldwide. Personally and professionally he reaps great satisfaction from putting into practice Joseph Pilates' main principle: "You're only as healthy as your spine."

As a spine specialist, Cohen helps a wide range of clients: pre- and postsurgical patients; people with back, knee, and shoulder injuries; athletes seeking to improve sports performance; and regular folks who just want to maintain their alignment.

In this workout created specifically for Pilates Style readers, Cohen uses one of his favorite pieces of equipment: the Baby Arc. "It's fantastic for improving spine mobility—thoracic extension, lateral flexion and combined movements," he says. "The Arc can guide the spine into directions of extension and sidebending, which are often difficult for clients to do correctly. It also strengthens the muscles around the spine that control these movements."

As with most exercises, you should consult a rehab professional if you have an injury. "If your studio does not have a Baby Arc, you could substitute a Ladder Barrel or Spine Corrector," notes Cohen. "But the Arc is more versatile for some exercises, not to mention an inexpensive way to get started."

Take a look at the challenging moves that Cohen demonstrates. "Nearly all are based on traditional Pilates exercises," he says. With dedicated practice you can graduate from simple strength and balance moves to challenging ones. But be careful. The Arc is padded and upholstered for comfort, yet when you try the side-to-side shifts on bridging and standing squats, you might want to pad your rear end.



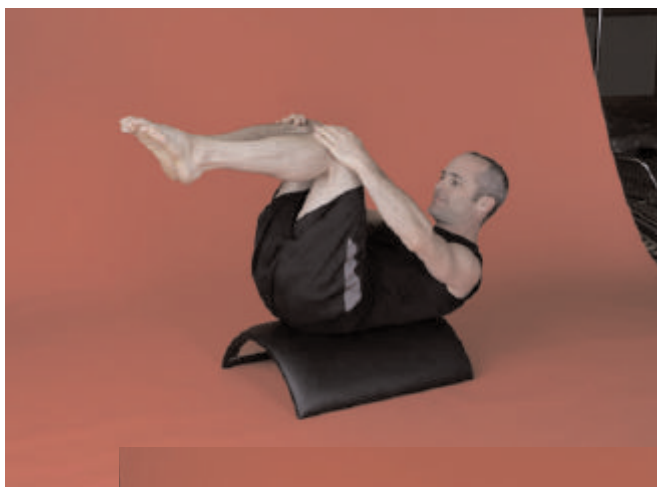
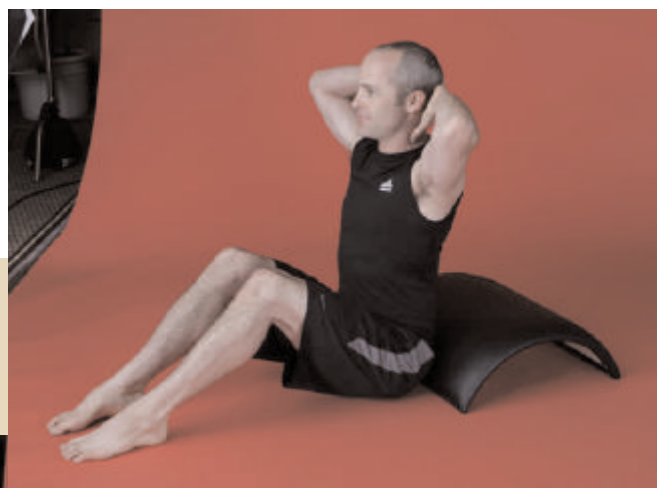
roll back

purpose: improved spinal mobility and abdominal strength

1. Sit on the ground with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Interlock your fingers behind your head. Your lower spine should be touching the base of the Arc.

2. Exhale and roll down one vertebra at a time onto the Arc until you are in a comfortable extension. Inhale at the bottom then exhale as you roll back up to start position. Perform 8 to 10 reps.

tip Maintain a connection from ribs to pelvis. Support your head and neck with your hands



double-leg stretch

purpose: improved spinal mobility; abdominal and hip flexor strength

1. Lie down lengthwise on the Arc with your tailbone at one end, the middle of your shoulder blades at the other. Bend your knees over your hips and place your hands on your knees. Curl up your head, neck and shoulders. Your lower spine should be imprinted.

2. Inhale and reach your arms and legs away from center, allowing your torso to roll back into extension over the edge of the Arc.

3. Exhale and circle your arms around and roll back up to starting position, bending your knees back over your hips. Perform 6 to 8 reps.

tip Lower your legs only as far as you can while still maintaining an imprinted lower spine.

side sit-ups



tip Make sure to keep the length through your spine and eyes gazing straight forward.

purpose: improved spinal mobility; strengthening of obliques and other muscles around the waist

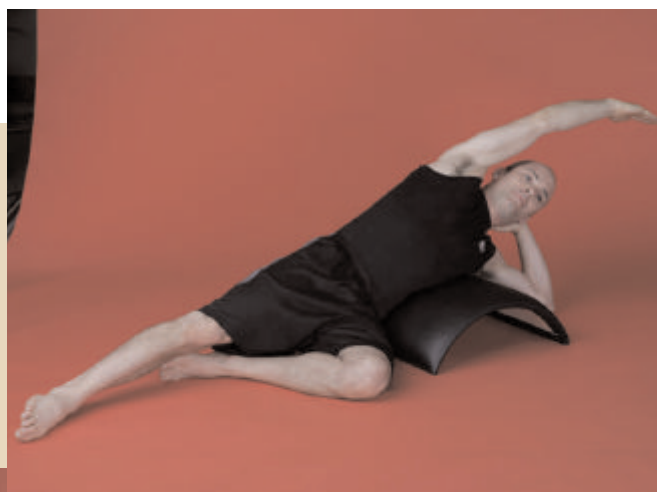
- 1.** Sit on the floor next to the Arc, which should be positioned so that your side is against the rounded part. The legs should be in a Z with your bottom knee bent and your top leg extended to the side. Interlock your fingers behind your head. The side of your rib cage should be touching the side of the Arc.
- 2.** Place your hands behind your head. Inhale and bend sideways over the Arc. Exhale and bend back up to start position. Perform 6 to 8 reps then switch sides.

side-lying armcircles

purpose: improved spinal mobility; shoulder range of motion; flexibility of the shoulder and chest muscles

- 1.** Start in the same position as side sit-ups. Interlock your fingers behind your head. The side of your rib cage should be touching the side of the Arc.
- 2.** Reach your outside arm overhead, keeping space between your ear and shoulder. Allow your head to rest on your inside hand so your neck can relax.
- 3.** Inhale and circle your outside arm back, gently rolling the upper torso into extension and rotation. Allow your gaze to follow your hand. Exhale and continue circling your arm and torso until the circle is complete. Reverse direction of circle. Perform 3 to 5 reps then switch sides.

tip Keep your pelvis stable so that the movement is only in your upper torso.





bridging

purpose: improved spinal mobility, balance and control; improved abdominal, hamstring and glute strength

1. Turn the Arc over, lie on the floor and place both feet on the upturned edges of the Arc with your knees bent. Extend your arms up to the ceiling in line with your shoulders.
2. Starting from your tailbone, exhale and curl your spine off the floor one vertebra at a time until you are in Bridge. Focus on keeping the Arc perfectly still.
3. Inhale at the top, then exhale and slowly roll down to start position. Perform 8 to 10 reps.

tip Keep your shoulders down and reach through your knees.

variation

1. Start as with bridging above. Once you are in Bridge, slowly shift your weight to one foot and press that side of the Arc toward the floor allowing the other side to lift up. Keep your pelvis stable, moving only through the legs.
2. Shift your weight back toward your other foot as you roll the Arc back to center, continuing to the other side. Perform 4 to 6 reps in each direction.

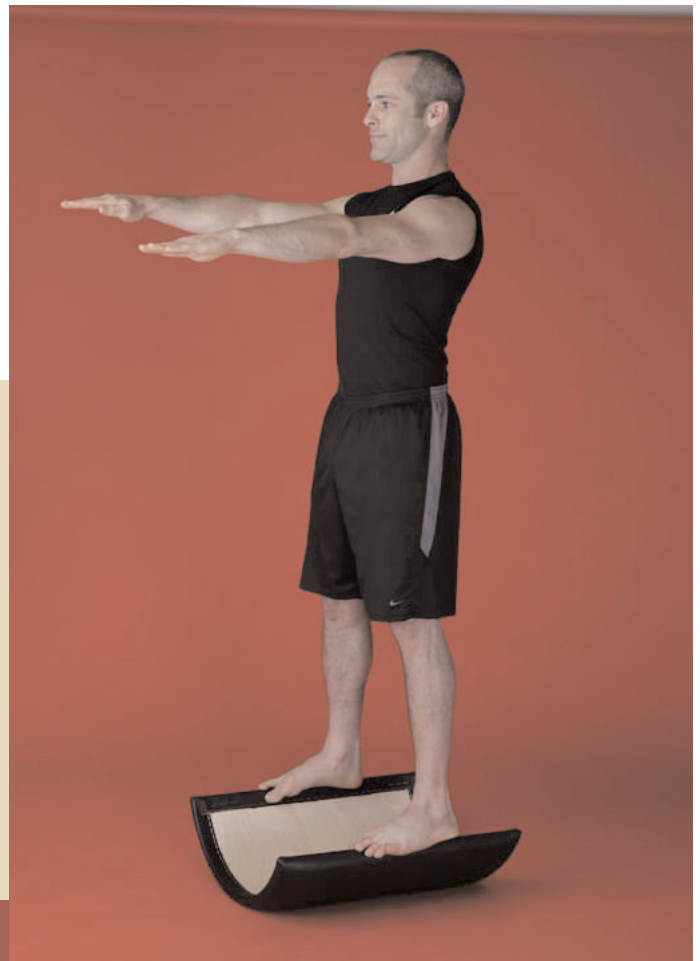
tip Keep your pelvis and upper body as stable as possible.

standing squats

purpose: improved balance, control and equal weight-bearing through the legs; improved quadriceps, hamstring and glute strength

1. Turn the Arc over so it's inverted and carefully stand on the edges. It may be helpful to use a wall for balance.
2. Inhale and bend both knees, slowly squatting down until your hips are even with your knees. Exhale and straighten your knees. Focus on keeping the Arc perfectly still. Perform 8 to 10 reps.

tip *Squat down only as far as is comfortable for your knees.*



variation

purpose: improved balance, control and equal weight bearing through the legs; improved quadriceps, hamstring and glute strength

1. Start as with standing squats. Once you are squatting, slowly press one foot toward the floor, rolling the Arc to the side. Allow your opposite leg to bend more.
2. Return to center and repeat on the other side. Perform 4 to 6 reps, alternating sides.

tip *For greater challenge, increase your speed.*

