

going natural

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Off the Track

by Dawna Stone

NEW DIGS, NEW WORKOUT

Dawna Stone visits her newest exercise terrain: the Power Pilates studio in New York City.

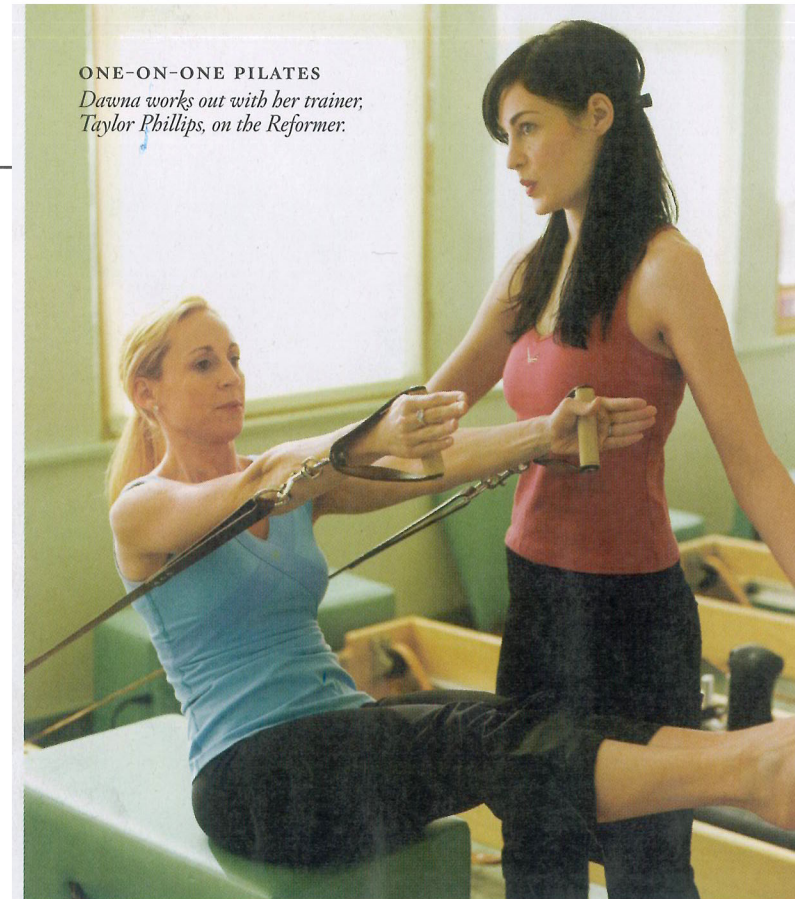


An athlete discovers patience—and her biggest fitness test—in an unexpected place

Dawna Stone, the winner of *The Apprentice: Martha Stewart*, has been an athlete all her life. She's used to challenges. But while she's no novice at healthy living, this year she'll find herself on a more holistic playing field. Guided by a team of experts from *Body+Soul*, Dawna has now embarked on an all-embracing tour of "whole living." Her new program designed so readers can follow along, is meant to make life more mindful, natural, and balanced. Dawna will chronicle her experience in a regular column in these pages. First stop on the mindful-fitness circuit: Pilates.

For me, exercise has always been about intensity. I've thrived on pushing myself beyond what I thought was possible. I love the sweat, the elevated heart rate, and the feeling of accomplishment after a hard workout. So when the editors of *Body+Soul* suggested starting a "mindful fitness" routine, I felt skeptical.

Pilates wasn't a foreign concept to me—I knew it had a reputation for stretching, strengthening, and balancing the body, and several of my close friends swear by it. For years, though, every time I planned to attend a Pilates



ONE-ON-ONE PILATES
Dawna works out with her trainer, Taylor Phillips, on the Reformer.

mat class at the gym, I made a quick detour and ended up in a spinning class or on the treadmill.

Before my first session at Power Pilates in New York City, I met with founder Howard Sichel, a chiropractor, for an evaluation. I had assumed that my body was in fine shape for Pilates. But according to Howard, I was a mess. My pelvis is tipped, he said, and my right arm is weaker than my left. (How can that be, I thought, if I'm right-handed?) My C5 and C6 vertebrae are compressed, probably from long hours of sitting in front of the computer. All this served as motivation to give Pilates a try.

My excitement dwindled minutes into my first session. The machines—the Reformer, the Cadillac, the Wunda Chair—looked a little like medieval torture devices. And I could not get the hang of exercises like the Stork,

in which you stand on the Reformer, raise one foot off the ground, and bring your knee to your chest. Even with my trainer, Taylor Phillips, guiding me through each of the exercises, I felt uncoordinated.

Given the choice, my first class would have been my last. But I remembered Howard and Taylor warning me that it would take several sessions before I would feel comfortable doing the exercises. Plus, I promised Howard I would complete at least two months' worth of classes, and I'm a woman of my word.

The next three or four sessions brought more of the same awkwardness. "This is my grandmother's workout, not mine," I thought. I began to dread going.

And then I went to session six. I can't pinpoint exactly when or why, but something "clicked" in my body, and I started enjoying myself. I also started

FOLLOW DAWNA'S PLAN

Next month, Dawna will write about her experience starting a daily meditation practice. If you start now, you'll be able to compare notes. Below are two more changes that Dawna will incorporate into her life. For her detailed plan, visit bodyandsoulmag.com.

+ Focus on whole foods. Choose whole grains over refined, and replace packaged foods with fresh ones.

+ Get a monthly massage. Don't think of it as an indulgence, but rather as an act of self-care.

to use my core rather than the other stronger muscle groups—one of the fundamental principles of Pilates. And I noticed small changes in my body—more flexibility, more definition in my abdominals, better posture.

It wasn't a fluke. By the seventh session, I felt fully present, and I thoroughly enjoyed the class. I now look forward to going and feel rejuvenated and more centered when I leave. I notice that I sit straighter and stand taller. And I focus more on being present in the moment—something that only Pilates has been able to teach me. Before this, all of my fitness activities had been about gaining speed and strength. This one was about slowing down and focusing.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not ready to trade in my running shoes for a Reformer, but I can see how Pilates is going to help me—physically and mentally. I've built my core strength, become more flexible, and improved my posture. But even more important, I've learned a kind of patience I didn't have before—and it paid off. +

DAWNA STONE is vice president, director of development of *Body+Soul* and founder of Her Sports magazine. Visit bodyandsoulmag.com for a link to Dawna's blog and tune in to her radio show, Health and Fitness Talk With Dawna Stone, Mondays from noon to 1 p.m. EST on *Martha Stewart Living Radio*. Sirius Satellite 112.

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