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Why this corporate trainer loves the plank and hates the dip

Gaiti Rabbani has found that learning and teaching Pilates has improved her self-awareness and confidence in her day-to-day role as a corporate trainer. She answers our Time Out Q&A.



Gaiti Rabbani of the Rabbani Collective says Pilates has helped her overcome body dysmorphia, as well as a whiplash injury from a car accident.

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Gaiti Rabbani is founder and managing director of Rabbani Collective, a consultancy that specialises in helping organisations foster better cross-cultural relationships in the workplace. She lives in Sydney.

How did you get into Pilates and how long have you been practising it? I discovered the benefits of Pilates about 10 years ago, and I've been teaching it for three. I signed up for Pilates training because I wanted to certify as a barre instructor but I thought I might be too old for the high-energy routines - then I found I was one of the fittest in my class, despite most of the students being half my age. A year later, I certified as a barre instructor, too.

What kind of Pilates do you teach? I teach mat classes, although I incorporate elements of yoga and ballet to cultivate flow, balance and strength. I like throwing in a surprise barre move, but without the support of an actual barre, and only telling my clients after they've managed the perfect balancing act.

Do you include cardio in your routine? Not intentionally, but if being out of puff and breaking a sweat equates to cardio, then my clients might say I do.



"When I teach, I'm completely in the zone and the stresses of my week seem to fade away," says Rabbani Collective founder Gaiti Rabbani.

Do you go to a class yourself or do it at home? I go to classes. I feel more energised in a class setting with an instructor to guide me, so I can switch gears and focus in on myself. I also regularly teach classes on weekends.

Do you feel different now compared with when you started? Yes, I feel so much more confident. I was overweight as a child, so I've spent many years dealing with body dysmorphia. Initially, it wasn't easy getting up in front of a class to teach, but I pushed through it to the point where I'm not as self-conscious, whether I'm teaching or participating.

Favourite Pilates exercise? I'm a big fan of planks - all variations. Planks are my happy place. Believe it or not, I also love lunges, but they often scare people off my classes, so I don't incorporate them as often as I would like to.

Least favourite? I hate triceps dips. I can't demonstrate them effectively because of a shoulder injury, and I've yet to feel the burn in my triceps to convince me they're worthwhile.

Has COVID-19 affected your routine? Only briefly during lockdown, when we all had to get savvy on Zoom, and I had to reorganise my home office. Initially, I resisted Zoom, but then found I learnt so much from the online experience.



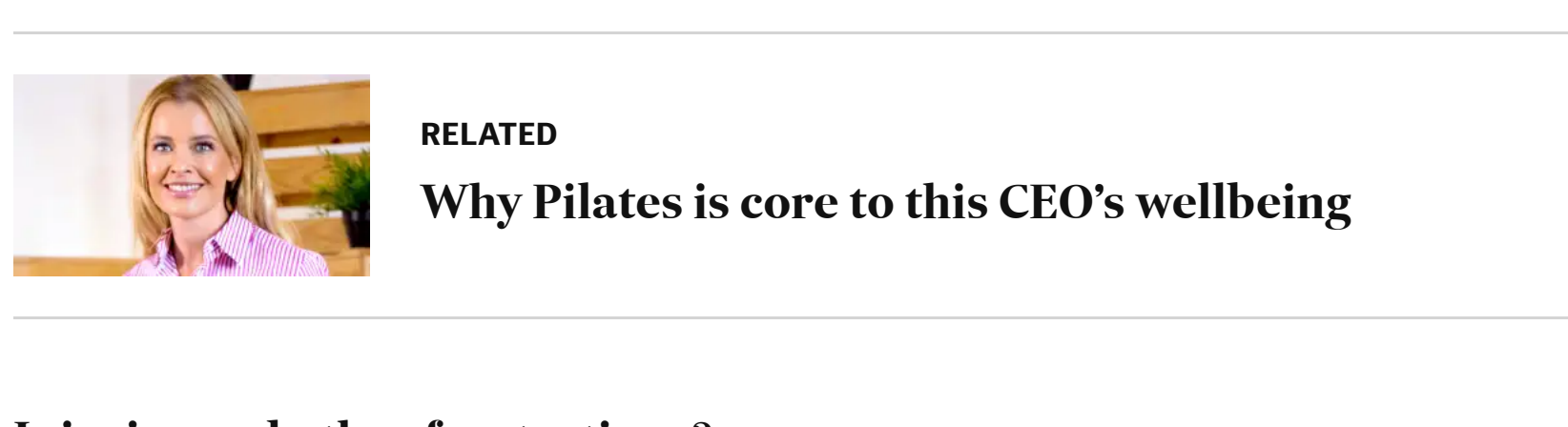
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Are there psychological aspects in Pilates? Absolutely. It helps cultivate a deeper level of co-ordination of mind and body, improves my awareness of how I carry myself and how I move, and makes me more confident over all.

After an intense week with business clients, I often ask myself why I committed to teaching an 8am Saturday class, but an hour later I feel energised and satisfied. When I teach, I'm completely in the zone and the stresses of my week seem to fade away.

Most memorable Pilates experience? I once did an improv training exercise where, as a group of about 12, we had to piece together routines by each teaching a few minutes of a class. The challenge was picking up from each other's sequences. I learnt so much about literally thinking on my feet and being clear and precise in instructing participants through creative but intuitive movement. I've since incorporated improv activities into my corporate training.

Most exotic place you've done Pilates? I attended an outdoor class in a park in Buenos Aires. After a couple of long-haul flights, I just needed to move my body. I didn't really speak enough Spanish for it, but it was a fun immersion in a new culture.



Injuries and other frustrations? Originally, it was my chiropractor who referred me to Pilates to manage flare-ups from a whiplash injury. I have cervical spine degeneration thanks to a car accident, which was exacerbated by poor posture. It still takes constant management.

Tips to become better at Pilates? Good technique is everything, so find an instructor who is pedantic about it and offers personal, even tactile, cues. It's not about keeping up with others. It's about tuning in to your own body and its strengths and limitations. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't right.

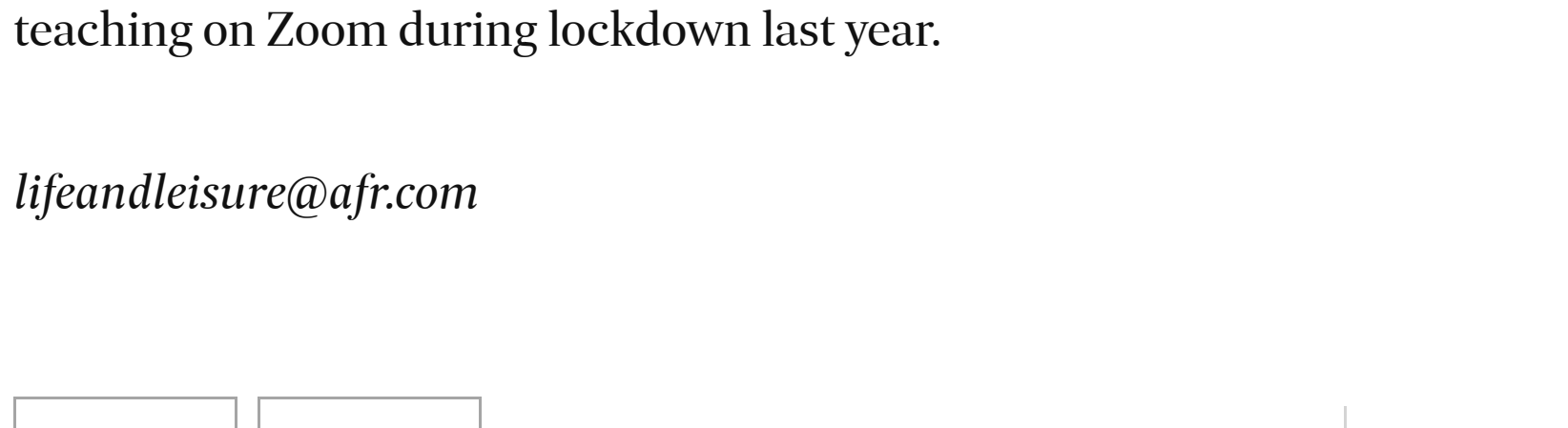
Most like to do Pilates with? Idris Elba or Hugh Jackman - or both.

Favourite Pilates gear? It's soft and stretchy, like a second skin, and the brand has a strong angle on sustainability.

Anything about Pilates you don't like? That it has a reputation. Some people are intimidated and think it's not inclusive - people often ask if they are fit enough to join my class, which baffles me. Other people dismiss it as "light on" but come to classes because their physiotherapist or chiropractor referred them.

It is seriously funny watching fit and strong people grimace their way through classes because they feel the burn of smaller muscle groups that often get ignored at the gym.

What do you love about it? I love the therapeutic effects of engaging the body in a healthy way.



Does Pilates complement your work? Absolutely. As someone who was very self-conscious, I have found a new sense of confidence as a trainer and facilitator. I find I'm more in tune with people's energy levels and able to manage the energy in a room much better. I have also learnt to project my voice more strongly after several weeks of teaching on Zoom during lockdown last year.

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