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# Stay younger with Pilates

VIV WATTS explains how the exercise system  
can help protect our bodies as we get older

**L**YNN ROBINSON'S arms are aching from proudly carrying her four-week-old granddaughter Amy Victoria around. And as one of the top Pilates experts in Britain, she is thankful that years of fitness training are standing her in good stead.

"I've realised that looking after grandchildren requires a lot of strength and flexibility," she laughs, "and if I hadn't got the arm strength, I'd be in trouble."

Lynne began practising Pilates in her native Australia when she developed a bad back. "I was in my late 30s before I started exercising," she says. "I'd avoided sport and gyms all my life before then."

After moving to London, she co-founded her **Body Control Pilates** system in 1996. She has produced around 30 books and DVDs and numbers Hugh Grant, Sophie Dahl and Holly Willoughby among her celebrity clients but she had always wanted to produce an exercise programme aimed at older people.

Her 60th birthday this year prompted her to put the plan into action. "It was like a milestone," she says. "I got my first free prescription and it makes you think about ageing. I knew Pilates could improve older people's health."

So with the help of fellow teacher Carmela Trappa, 53, Lynne has produced **Pilates For Life**, a book aimed at improving strength and flexibility in people over 40. And if

40 seems early to be falling into the "older" category, Lynne says it is never too soon – or too late – to start building up physical fitness.

The book claims some old age problems can be slowed down, stopped or even reversed. Take osteoporosis. "All women will eventually have some degree of bone loss," says Lynne. "But if in your 40s you build up bone strength – your bone bank – it's like money in the account for the years when you begin to lose some of that density."

Pilates is not meditative like yoga or strenuous like aerobics. Its gentler, slower-paced exercises put the emphasis on staying flexible and building up strength so they are ideally suited to age-related problems.

In Lynne's new programme there are exercises to build upper-body mobility after breast cancer surgery but also for those with heart and lung diseases and for movement problems associated with Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis.

Those with mental health issues such as

depression, anxiety, dementia and Alzheimer's can also benefit.

And there are tips for mechanical problems such as knee or hip replacements.

I present myself to Carmela at BCP's London studio. Sadly I am well qualified, being over 40, too heavy, unfit and with a newly replaced hip.

Carmela was a civil engineer in her native Italy and when I ask how it helps with teaching Pilates she says: "A structure is a structure whether it's a building or a human."

I fear that if my body were a structure it would have a demolition order on it.

She checks my posture, then tells me to close my eyes and stand up straight. When I open them I am leaning heavily to one side, a legacy of limping for several years. "Your brain compensates and tells you that you're straight when you're not," says Carmela. "You have to break the habit and retrain the brain."

And that is what she sets out to do, teaching me to be constantly aware of how I'm standing.

"You must have posh attitude," exhorts Carmela, by which she means head up, back straight, look ahead and walk with confidence. Between lessons I check and correct my reflected posture in so many shop doorways that I begin to look sinister.

**C**ARMELA makes tiny, subtle corrections to my posture and how I move and breathe. Sometimes we use the studio machinery – developed originally by Joseph Pilates to help his clients work against resistance – but all the exercises in the book can be done at home and with no special equipment.

After three sessions with Carmela a colleague said: "What have you done? You're taller." And a furtive check in the window glass told me that I was standing far straighter.

I have a way to go but I now know that it's not too late to straighten up.

- *To order Pilates For Life: How to improve strength, flexibility*

*and health over 40, by Lynne Robinson and Carmela Trappa, published by Kyle Books, £18.99, call The Express Bookshop on 01872 562 310; send a cheque/PO payable to Express Bookshop to Express Bookshop, PO Box 200, Falmouth TR11 4WJ; or order online at [expressbookshop.com](http://expressbookshop.com). UK delivery is free. The Body Control Pilates app for Apple and Android (standard programme, not specifically for older people) launches at the end of this month, price 69p. Visit [bodycontrolpilates.com](http://bodycontrolpilates.com) for details*



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