

# the great wall of pilates

**instead of a coffee break, take a pilates break!**  
this five-minute routine is your key to overall  
strength and stress relief in your lower back and neck

**BY SHARI BERKOWITZ**

**D**oes this sound familiar: slumped over a computer screen, ergonomically incorrect, your neck, shoulders and back out of alignment, and a dull ache and exhaustion creeping through your body?

The problem is that we are not meant to sit hunched at a desk all day long. We are meant to be mindful and physical beings, walking, moving around, staying active. So what do you do when you're stuck in your office and can't get out for a workout that will help revitalize your body and mind? Here's the solution: Do my superquick routine, the Great Wall of Pilates.

The Wall is a special group of classical Pilates exercises. The whole routine takes just five minutes, and the only equipment you need is—how'd you guess?—a wall! These moves are a great mini-break from work: They'll release stress, get your endorphins pumping, lengthen and realign your spine, and help renew you when the day has beaten you down a bit. They'll help you disconnect from work for a few minutes and bring you back in to your mind-body connection.

Do this routine anytime during the day when you feel you need a physical refresher—think of it as hitting the restart button on your computer. You can also integrate this into its traditional time slot, at the end of your regular workout. The routine targets back muscles, abdominals, shoulders, quadriceps, hamstrings and inner thighs. Just one caveat: Though it can be a great stopgap solution when you can't exercise for a day or two, it's not meant to be a replacement for your regular workout.

Beginners and advanced students alike can benefit from the Wall, but everyone needs to follow the same guidelines: Abdominals must always be engaged (scoop them in and up). When doing the squats, make sure your torso and thighs, thighs and calves, and calves and feet are all at 90 degree (right) angles.

Dress Code: Ladies, if you're wearing heels, kick 'em off. (You may work out in flats or sneakers.) Gents: Please remove your jacket and tie. Now go have fun giving new meaning to *hitting a wall*.

## find your bony landmarks

**purpose:** helps you discover the back body and the curves of spine and back ribs; strengthens upper back, shoulder blades and abdominals

**setup:** Place your back against a wall. One at a time, step your feet forward one foot length away from the wall, heels together and toes apart. Keep your arms relaxed at your sides.

**1.** Keeping your knees soft, place your sacrum (the back of your hips) against the wall, allowing the curve of your lower back to stay away from the wall. Draw your abdominals in and up and breathe into your back ribs.

**2.** Open your collarbones wide and

lightly press your shoulder blades back into the wall. Lengthen your neck and place the back of your head against the wall.

**3.** Locate your bony landmarks—the back of your hips and ribs, your shoulder blades and the back of your head, making sure they are all against the wall. Inhale and exhale into these bony landmarks. Repeat for 3–5 breaths, breathing into your back.

**tip:** Keep your abdominals drawn in and up as you breathe into your back.

**advanced:** Stand with your feet parallel and together instead of in Pilates stance.



## arm circles



**purpose:** strengthens upper back, shoulders and chest; opens collarbones

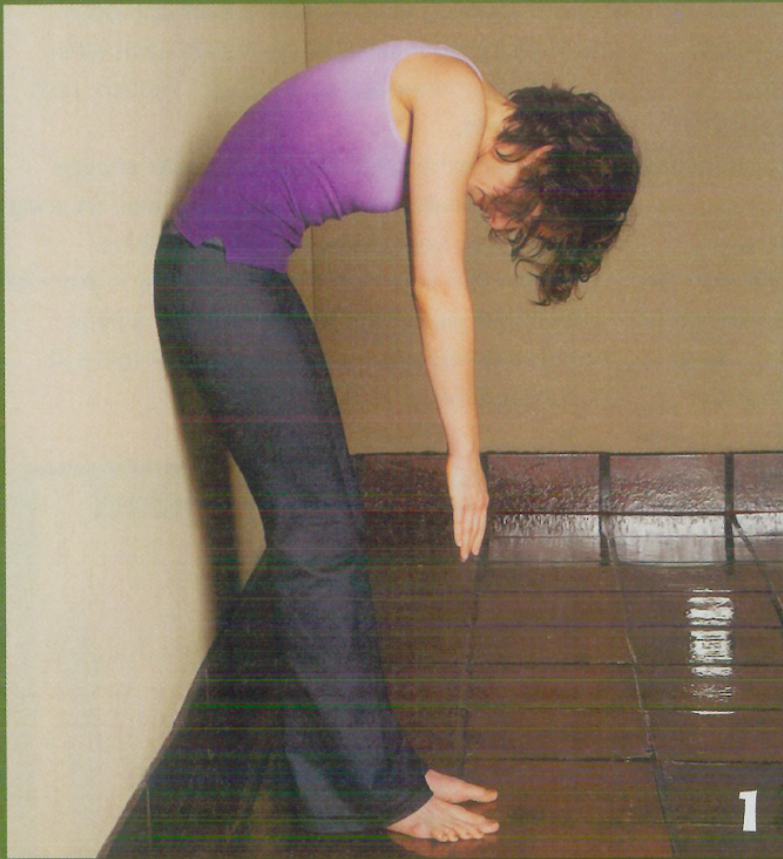
**setup:** Same as in previous. Maintain connection of (or reconnect) your bony landmarks, drawing your shoulder blades lightly against the wall but strongly into your back. Extend your arms forward to shoulder height, fingertips together.

**1.** Keeping your abdominals engaged, make circles with your arms, reaching out from your upper arm bone and keeping the circles slow and controlled. Circle your arms as high as your ears/eyes and equally around, with your armpit as the center of the circle. Circle your arms 5 times in each direction.

**tip:** Keep your arms in your peripheral vision at all times.

**advanced:** Circle your arms in a wider range of motion but stay in your peripheral vision, making sure your arms remain between your eyes and ears and not farther down than your hips.

## roll-down



**purpose:** stretches and strengthens back and your abdominals

**setup:** same as in previous

**1.** With slow, controlled movements, roll down the wall one vertebra at a time. Make sure you engage your abdominals to support your back as you roll lower and lower. Imagine that you're a Slinky going down a set of stairs, but make sure each backbone touches the wall one at a time. Stop rolling when your palms are aligned with your knees.

**2.** Keeping your arms loose and your abdominals scooped in, make light, floppy circles (about the size of a dinner plate). Make 5 circles in each direction.

**3.** Roll up to starting position, articulating your spine.

**tips:** Pull your abdominals in strongly away from the floor and keep your knees softly bent.

## breathing

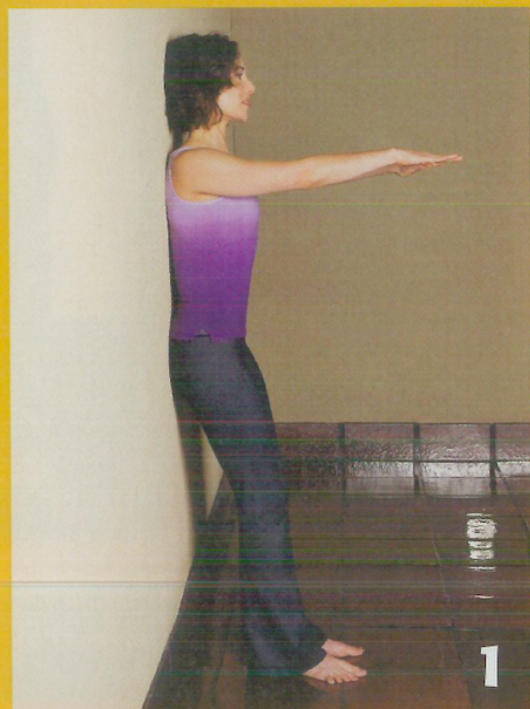
**purpose:** connects abdominals with back body; strengthens abs, diaphragm, back and shoulders

**setup:** same as in previous

**1.** Inhale and, with control, extend your arms in front of you at shoulder height, or only as high as you can keep your bony landmarks against the wall. Exhale and slowly lower your arms as low as you can keep your bony landmarks against the wall. Each time you lift and lower your

arms, work to create resistance against the air, initiating the movement from your upper arm bones while keeping your shoulder blades back. Do 3–5 repetitions.

**tips:** If your arms go higher than shoulder level, keep your shoulder blades down and back and away from your ears. If your arms are shoulder-height or lower, keep your shoulder blades back against the wall and your collarbones open.



# squats

**purpose:** strengthens abdominals, quadriceps, hamstrings, inner thighs, back and shoulders

**setup:** Same as in previous, but turn your feet parallel, one fist-width apart. Step another foot-length forward, keeping your bony landmarks against the wall.

**1.** Bending your knees, glide your back down along the wall until your thighs are parallel with the floor. Keep knees over ankles and shins perpendicular to the floor so that they create right angles with your thighs. Extend your arms to shoulder

height, keeping your shoulders back and down.

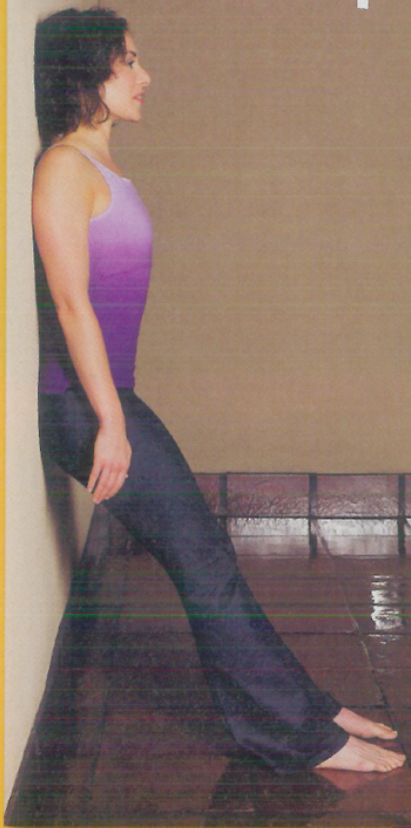
**2.** Hugging your inner thighs toward each other so that your kneecaps face straight forward, hold for 3 counts.

**3.** Placing extra pressure in your heels, engage your abdominals and slide back up the wall, returning your arms to your sides. Do 3–5 repetitions.

**tip:** Maintain your bony landmarks and make sure your knees do not go forward of your ankles.

**modification:** Keep your arms against the wall the entire time. 🌟

## setup

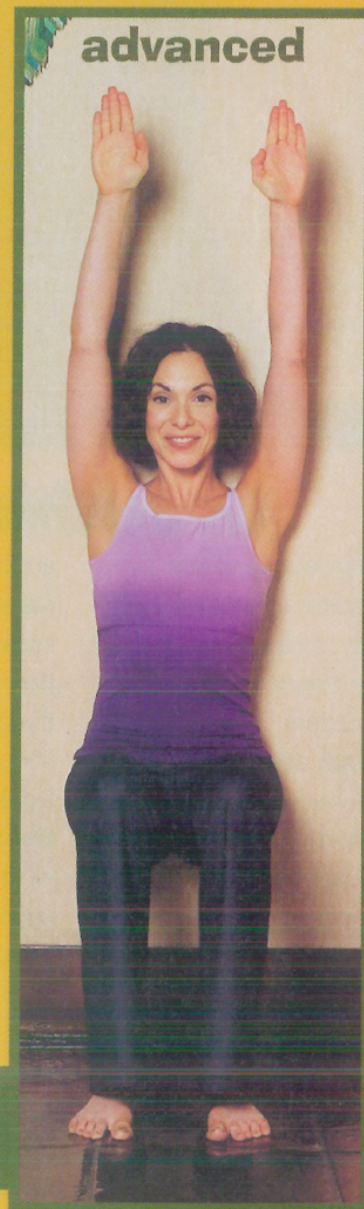


Want more from Shari? Check out our October newsletter for an extra wall exercise. Sign up for free at [pilatesstyle.com](http://pilatesstyle.com).

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## advanced



**advanced:** Extend your arms all the way to the ceiling until your upper arm bone is between your eyes and ears. Hold for 5 counts and steadily increase to 15.