

Equipment TLC

We asked apparatus manufacturers what they wish you knew about caring for your Pilates equipment.

by Shari Berkowitz

You've spent a lot of money on the equipment in your studio, so it makes sense to take care of it in order to extend its life and keep it in the best possible working order. "The cleaning and maintenance of your equipment is directly related to its longevity," explains Brian Bretall, owner of Rocky Mountain Pilates Chairs, a seven-month-old company dedicated to custom-building affordable Chairs. How often you clean and maintain your equipment is based on the hours of use, he says. "More use equals more maintenance." But it turns out there are many different opinions among equipment manufacturers when it comes to the best methods for maintaining, cleaning and caring for equipment. I asked them to weigh in on the most frequently asked questions.

UPHOLSTERY

Pilates Style: There's a lot of controversy over what to use to clean the upholstery: soapy water versus diluted tea tree oil (which is believed to have antiseptic and anti-microbial properties). What do you recommend?



GRATZ PILATES SPINE CORRECTOR

Dave Littman, director of business development for Balanced Body in Sacramento, CA: There are two theories on cleaning upholstery: Clean every bug, but powerful anti-microbial cleaners can shorten material life, or use tea tree oil, which doesn't kill the bugs but is natural. We recommend using gentle soap and warm water. Plain water is also a good cleaner.

David Rosencranz, managing partner of Gratz Pilates in Long Island City, NY: Just a few drops of liquid soap in warm water in a spray bottle is all you need. The Naugahyde we use is inherently antiseptic, durable and easily maintained. If you use tea tree oil, just use one drop in a half gallon of water.

Peak Pilates® Customer Service in Boulder, CO: Use a mild soap-and-water solution to clean upholstery. Some off-the-shelf cleaners may contain ingredients such as alcohol or silicone which can cause the vinyl to dry out, crack, or wear out prematurely.

Basil Blecher, president of Pilates Designs by Basil in Astoria, NY: One thing to avoid: tea tree oil. It will dry up the vinyl and crack it. Only use soapy water, such as highly diluted dishwashing

or laundry soap. An anti-bacterial is too harsh and is unnecessary as our vinyl has antimicrobial qualities.



Sandy Gardner, vice president of sales and customer service for Merrithew Health & Fitness™ and their premier brand STOTT PILATES® in Toronto: We recommend wiping down vinyl components with tea tree oil cleaner between sessions, or at least once daily. More persistent marks can be treated with mild, soapy water.

PS: What do you recommend to maintain smooth-running wheels on the Reformer as well as other equipment?

Littman of Balanced Body: On our Reformers, the wheels and bearings are sealed so there is no need to lubricate them, though it is important to keep them clean. We suggest you disconnect all springs from the bar, wipe down the entire track using a grease-cutting cleaner such as Windex or diluted Super Green (anything you'd clean your kitchen counter with), then hold a towel against the wheels as you move the carriage and spin them back and forth. Do not spray anything directly on the tracks and wheels.

Rosencranz of Gratz: Gratz Reformer wheels are hard rubber and do not contain bearings so they roll effortlessly; they are meant to have resistance as they slide on the rails, giving our equipment a unique "feel." Too much resistance, however, is not good, so they need to be kept clean. If the wheels

are noisy or sticking, there could be an accumulation of dust, hair, etc.; sometimes wiping the inner wheel and applying a single drop of three-in-one oil or a tiny blast of WD-40 on the wheel shaft can provide short-term relief. If your studio is busy and the equipment is used continuously, you might need to perform a more comprehensive cleaning approximately once a year and remove and lubricate the carriage wheels. We have downloadable cleaning and assembly instructions on our website (www.pilates-gratz.com).

Peak Pilates: All Peak Pilates Reformer wheel bearings are sealed and permanently lubricated, so simply keeping the axels and rails clean will ensure efficient operation.

Blecher of Pilates Designs by Basil: Once a week, wipe down the tracks with soapy water to make sure no deposits have formed. To remove any surplus grease from the axels, wrap a piece of cord about 3/16" in diameter around the axle and then pull it out. Repeat every two to three months. If grease hardens on track, use a scraper or putty knife to remove the excess. Then clean with Naphtha Thinner to remove the residue, followed by soapy water. Should you need to re-lubricate, use White Lithium Grease. You need to do maintenance every three months if your Reformer is used six to eight hours a day, or as little as twice a year if it is less busy.

Gardner of Merrithew: Our fixed and floating rollers are sealed and do not require additional lubrication. They require replacing only if you detect roughness or a metallic sound when they move across the rails.

LEATHER STRAPS/ROPES
PS: How do you clean and maintain the straps, ropes and cotton loops on the equipment?

Littman of Balanced Body: Leather straps stretch and over time will require adjustment. Ropes don't stretch, but with use, they get fuzzy or lumpy. These are not safety issues but they should be replaced every five years. Cotton loops

CARING FOR CORDS

Suspension equipment has been popping up in Pilates studios across the country for good reason: Redcord® balances body weight and provides sling training to help your body move correctly and recuperate from injury, while Biocored™ allows you to practice resistance and neutral-toning exercises. Two experts weigh in with tips for maintaining your cords so they go the distance.

- 1 Clean as often as possible.** "Handles and leashes can be washed with soap and cold water, and left to air dry," Mary Kim-Garrity of Biocored says. "A mix of tea tree oil and water (approximately 5 drops per 8 ounces of water) is a natural disinfectant as well."
- 2 Be aware of wear and tear.** "Anything greater than a 'fray,' such as separation of fibers, indicates the rope should be replaced," says Kimberly Corp, co-director of instructor development for Redcord USA. "For the attachments and clips, always make sure they are free of nicks or bends."
- 3 Do a once over.** "Always examine the equipment each day before use, even if it has been used for a long period of time already," says Kim-Garrity.

—Valentina Palladino



should be laundered once a month in a gentle cycle wash and air-dried.

Rosencranz of Gratz: Our leather straps are easily adjustable with the eyehook and nut assembly under the carriage. (We'll also substitute canvas straps for leather for vegans upon request.) While there's no operational need to wipe down the straps, running a cloth over them with a mild soapy solution can be useful in keeping the patina and color consistent. For canvas loops or straps, wipe them down with a damp cloth. If they are really dirty, lightly scrub with an old toothbrush, water and soap.

Peak Pilates: A good, commercially available leather conditioner can be used on the leather straps as desired. We've received great feedback from customers who have used Leather Honey. Ropes generally do not require cleaning. They should be replaced each year, depending on equipment use.

Blecher of Pilates Designs by Basil: If straps are too harsh or hard when they are new, you can soften them with saddle soap or leave them in a bucket of water to soften up.

Gardner of Merrithew: Our Reformer straps may be cleaned in mixture of water and tea tree oil.

SPRINGS

PS: Is there anything we can do to do to maintain the health of our springs on all apparatus? What do we need to watch out for?

Littman of Balanced Body: We recommend that springs be replaced after 3,000 hours of use (that's five hours a day, five days a week, 50 weeks a year) or every three to four years, whichever comes first. If you notice any separations or gaps in the spring coils, replace immediately. Rotate your same color Reformer springs periodically and consistently; keep track of the dates in your log.

NEW OFFERINGS

Looking for some additional equipment for your studio? Consider these new releases:

Balanced Body Allegro 2 System Reformer is designed to be easier to use; accessories can be added for more programming options, including a Tower, a mat conversion, sitting Box and Reformer legs (basic version, \$2,695). Balanced Body also has new products that complement Pilates: CoreAlign (basic version \$2,495) and Orbit (\$229; www.pilates.com).



Peak Pilates® new **fit™ Reformer** is a lightweight and durable piece of equipment that offers a unique stacking and vertical storage solution (\$2,295; www.peakpilates.com).



Stott Pilates has a new **Rotational Diskboard Deluxe** (\$359-399) and **Cardio-Tramp™ Rebounder** (\$270-300; www.stotpilates.com).



Pilates by Basil barre for barre workouts attaches to your wall unit or Cadillac (\$275; www.pilatesdesignsbybasil.com).

ACCESSORY CARE

It's equally important to keep small apparatus and accessories clean. Here's how:

Wrist Assured Gloves (WAGs)

These therapeutic fitness gloves should be washed in cold water and air dried, advises Paula Wilbert, president of Joint Protection Products. Keep them away from sunlight and extreme heat. Remove the gloves from the palm side and be careful not to just pull at the index finger and thumb parts of the gloves.

Mats, Rollers and Balls

"Clean the mats and rollers with mild soap and water," says Michelle Braun, spokesperson for OPTP (Orthopedic Physical Therapy Products). Never use a harsh chemical, and keep them out of direct sun and away from heat.

Magic Circles

Wipe pads with a cloth dampened with soapy water.

Rosencranz of Gratz: If you see any deformation or uneven spacing or hear a continual groaning sound from the springs, that is potentially a sign of metal fatigue and you should replace the springs. We recommend that springs under high usage should be changed every one and a half to two and a half years.

Peak Pilates: The springs can be wiped down daily with a wet cloth at the same time you clean the whole machine. Make sure they are completely dry so water does not sit between the coils. Users should inspect springs on a regular basis, perhaps at the end of each day, looking specifically for signs of fatigue such as nicks, separations in the coils, abrasions of any kind to the metal and (very rarely) rust. Based on life testing of all Peak Pilates® springs, replacement every two years is recommended or every year in a high-use facility for safety.

Gardner of Merrithew: Springs can be dusted off with a dry cloth as needed. Inspect all springs on a weekly basis. Replace immediately

if you notice any spaces between the coils. We recommend that springs be replaced as needed or at least every two years.

ADDITIONAL PARTS

PS: Are there any connections or other parts we ought to be concerned about? What about the canopy of the Cadillac or hooks?

Littman of Balanced Body: The canopy needs to be properly "tuned" to the base frame. The Push-Through Bar should move smoothly and quietly on a properly tuned Cadillac canopy. When it is not tuned, the Trapeze Bar won't move well. The Balanced Body website provides instructions on carriage and trap canopy tuning that can be downloaded and podcast.

Gardner of Merrithew: Spring clips should be replaced annually or when required. Pulley Post Assembly should be replaced as needed.

Rosencranz of Gratz: The canopy should move smoothly and not stick. If it does, use mild

soapy water to wipe it down or use Scotch-Brite Pads to clean. Remember, the canopy is meant to have texture. If you move it back and forward pushing from the center, then it will move more smoothly and you can change its position. Also, always check all eyehooks and clips for signs of wear. If the hooks look thinner on the inner radius, they should be changed. While we use strong cast steel hooks, the movement of metal against metal can wear and make the metal thinner, so they should be inspected every couple of months.

Peak Pilates: During regular inspection, check all attaching clips and eyebolts on all apparatus. Look for wear of any kind on these items and replace as necessary.

Blecher of Pilates Designs by Basil: The trapeze should slide freely. If you have any trouble, loosen two corners at the same end of the canopy, bring the trap to that end, and make sure it moves freely there then tighten that end. Repeat at the other end. The securing screws of

the Cadillac should be really tight. Check them every three months. Examine hooks and clips for wear. If a chair hinge squeaks, determine why it is squeaking. If the knuckle hinge is squeaking against the wood of the chair, you can put a shim-spacer (even just a strip of a manila folder) between the hinge and the wood. If the hinge is free and squeaks, use WD-40 and wipe away the residue.

Bretall of Rocky Mountain Pilates

Chairs: The wood, springs and attachment hardware need to be wiped down with a damp cloth to keep them free of body oils and sweat. Compressed air canisters can be used to remove dust and dirt from the hinge. Use a silicon based spray to lubricate the hinges on your chairs. Silicon spray will not attract dust like a petroleum-based lubricant (such as WD-40). Using the red application tube provided with the silicon bottle, spray a small amount into each hinge opening across the length of the entire hinge. After spraying lubricant into the hinge, cycle the pedal a few times to

make sure any noises are gone, and then wipe away any excess that may have gotten onto the wood.

SECRETS

PS: What is one thing you wish your clients would do to maintain their apparatus?

Littman of Balanced Body:

Make an equipment maintenance notebook, with a section for each piece of equipment. Note purchase date, serial number, and if you cannot find a serial number, assign one yourself. For each machine, keep track of maintenance, inspections, any parts that are replaced (note recommendations on spring replacement above), and any issues that may arise (including the circumstances, if possible) and how they were resolved. This information can be very helpful if a problem arises.

Rosencranz of Gratz: If parts are wearing unevenly, check the floor to make sure it is level! All four legs of a Reformer or a Cadillac must make contact with the floor. You can

use a rubber pad or shim to level an uneven surface. We encourage our clients to call us with any maintenance concerns or questions.

Peak Pilates: Routine maintenance is key. During normal use, a weekly regimen of inspecting components and accessories for wear, verifying that fasteners are tight and a quick wipe-down will keep the equipment running smoothly for a lifetime.

Blecher of Pilates Designs by Basil:

A lot of clients are uneducated about their equipment. I'm accessible and would be happy to talk to them!

Gardner of Merrithew: We strongly recommend that owners follow the Inspection & Maintenance Schedule provided with each piece of Stott Pilates equipment. **PS**

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