

build a ballet body.

These easy, ballet-inspired moves from fitness trainer [Edwina Griffin](#) will help you develop a sleeker, more flexible physique.

It's easy to spot a dancer: whether she's walking or standing, there will be a certain poise and grace that's unmistakable. Ballet is a great activity for improving posture, focusing the mind, creating alignment and strengthening the body. Dancers are required to not only lengthen muscles to create flexibility at the joints but to work on core strength (i.e. the deep muscles of the trunk, spine, pelvis and shoulder girdle), as good posture is integral to achieving and holding the challenging poses.

The Pilates system, pioneered by Joseph Pilates (1880-1967), was used by famous dancer-choreographers like George Balanchine, Martha Graham and Jerome Robbins, who all sent their dancers to Pilates' New York studio for training and rehabilitation. The six principles behind Pilates are the same as for ballet:

Being able to move the body in an elegant, poised way improves posture and releases tension – plus, it feels wonderfully sensuous.

concentration, control, centering, precision, flowing, movement and breathing. Pilates' core-focused approach builds strength while encouraging flexibility and trains your body to move in safer, more efficient ways. Correct diaphragmatic breathing helps you perform the movements with maximum power and also reduces stress.

Even if you're not planning on auditioning for *The Nutcracker* any time soon, you can develop muscle balance, symmetry and tone by signing up for one of the many ballet- or dance-inspired classes at your gym, as well as trying the program here.



BALLET IMAGES: ISTOCK IMAGES

One leg circle

- 1 | Lie on your back with legs bent, arms by your sides. Pull in your stomach muscles and activate your pelvic floor muscles for stability.
- 2 | Keeping your pelvis and shoulders still, inhale and lift your right leg towards the ceiling. Exhale, and cross it over your left hip, letting it drop to the floor. Inhale and lift the leg back up, then exhale and place it back down straight again.
- 3 | Repeat on the other side, lifting and circling with your left leg. This forms one set – do five. Use your breathing to control and pace the movement: inhale to lift, exhale to cross over and come down in a curve.

Tip To increase the challenge, use a theraband to create more resistance.



Swimming

A terrific full-body exercise, this works almost every muscle.

- 1 | Lie on your stomach, legs straight and arms out in front. Ensure that your shoulder blades are down and back, maintaining the space between your ears and shoulders.
- 2 | Pull in your stomach muscles for stability – aim to lift your stomach off the floor. Extending from your core, lengthen your arms and legs so that they lift off the floor. At the same time, lengthen your spine so that your head lifts off the floor, keeping your face down in a neutral position.
- 3 | Reach your right arm and left leg out from your centre, pumping them in small, pulse-like movements and breathing in for a count of five extensions and out for a count of five extensions. Repeat using your left arm and right leg. This forms one set – repeat twice.



The saw

This stretches the back, hamstrings and chest.

- 1 | Sit up straight on your sitting bones, legs straight out in front and shoulder-width apart. Hold your arms out straight, at shoulder height.
- 2 | Inhale as you lengthen your spine, activate your abdominal muscles and rotate your torso to your right side. Ensure your hips stay still and in line with each other, facing the front. Exhale and look back towards your right hand as you stretch and reach forward the little finger of your left hand towards the outside of your right foot.

- 3 | Inhale and return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side. This forms one set – repeat three times.

Tip If your hamstrings are tight, put a folded blanket or towel under your hips to help you get into the right position.



Spinal twist

This is good for creating mobility through the upper back and also for stabilising the pelvis.

- 1 | Sit up straight on your sitting bones, legs straight out in front of you and feet flexed so you feel the stretch extending through your heels. Pull your stomach in and activate your pelvic floor muscles for stability and hold your arms out at shoulder height, palms down. Imagine there is a helium balloon attached to your head and lengthen your spine; feel the energy move down through your tailbone to the floor. Keep your shoulders relaxed and rib cage down.

- 2 | Exhale in two stages: firstly, as you twist half-way around to your right, being sure to keep your pelvis stable, your feet in line with each other and to twist from your waist, not your shoulders; then exhale again as you twist around as far as you can. As you twist, think of the movement as wringing all the stale air out of your body.
- 3 | Inhale and return to the starting position. Repeat on the left side. This forms one set – repeat five times.



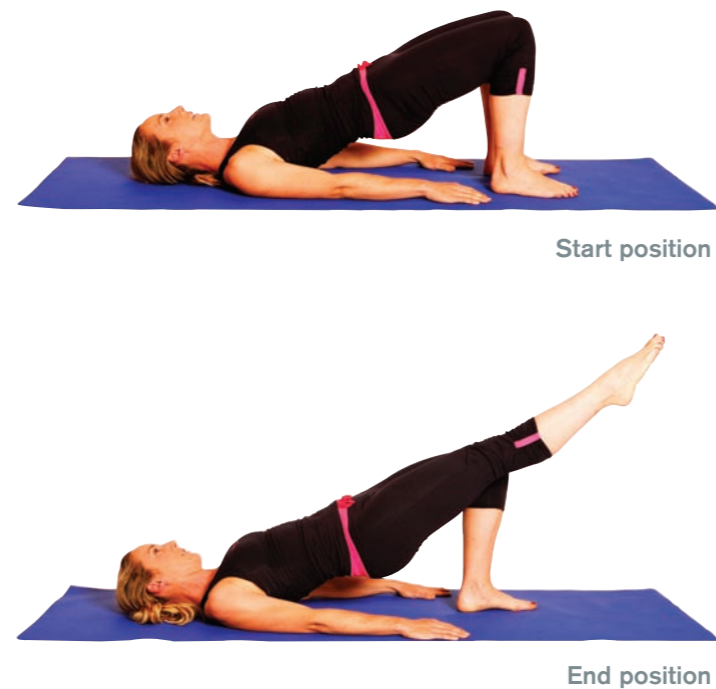
FORM TIP

If you find it difficult to coordinate the breathing patterns at first, just breathe at your own pace. As you become more familiar with the exercise, the breathing will follow.

The bridge

- 1 | Lie on your back with your knees bent, arms by your sides. Inhale and press down on your feet as you lengthen your spine, activate your abdominal and hamstring muscles and lift your hips up to form a 'bridge', keeping your knees, hips and shoulders in line.
- 2 | Keeping your pelvis stable and your chest open, inhale, and then straighten and lift your right leg off the floor and hold for a count of five. Ensure your knees remain in line and lengthen your extended leg and head away from each other.
- 3 | Exhale and return leg to starting position. Repeat on the left side. This forms one set – repeat twice.

Tip To increase the challenge, bend your extended leg into a 'table top' position and hold it for a count of five, ensuring that you keep your shoulders and neck relaxed and your pelvis stable.



EDWINA GRIFFIN is a personal fitness trainer. In addition to running her Sydney studio, Fitwomen, Edwina runs health retreat weekends, corporate fitness programs and 'adventurewomen' holidays. Call Edwina on 02 9315 7999, email edwina@fitwomen.com.au, or visit www.fitwomen.com.au