

New Times 10/3112

The vulnerability of skiers' knees is well-documented. Much like runners' knees, however, the source of such discomfort is often weak or tight hips. While strength training to target that area helps, it does nothing for flexibility. What's a skier to do? Pilates and yoga to the rescue.

A skier herself, Valerie Patrick has owned Fitness & Dance of Central New York for seven years. "If I have a group of skiers in the class, I will gear the class toward the sport," she says. "Both yoga and Pilates have so much to offer."

While that's true for any athletic pursuit, skiers need specific, targeted exercises. "Skiing requires a lot of the lower body," says Patrick, who operates her studio at 5620 Business Ave. (off Route 11), Cicero. "The strength aspect of both yoga and Pilates is great to prevent injuries. We work on strengthening all the muscles around the knees to keep them safe. We also strengthen calf muscles, hamstrings and quads."



At the same time, skiers need strong arms, shoulders, back and core to navigate down the hill or across the snowy terrain. "Upper body, too, is so important for skiing. When you cushion a fall, you put your hands out. And you need core and upper body strength to get yourself back up. And while you ski, there is a lot of rotation and oblique work; Pilates will help strengthen those areas, too."

While Pilates is more focused on building strength, yoga works to enhance flexibility and balance. “Both are an overall body workout,” says Patrick, “but the mental focus that yoga requires helps with concentration while skiing, and the balance that yoga builds is important, too.”

Patrick works one-on-one with clients—skiers or not—using Pilates equipment with names better suited to a Medieval dungeon. The reformer, the tower, the chair and more sound like torture devices instead of ways to strengthen and tone your body without the use of weights. But they still give clients pause.

“I’ll walk people through the studio and they’ll see that Pilates equipment and they’ll ask me, ‘What do you do on that thing?’ But once they do it, they love it,” Patrick says with a laugh. “You have to experience it to really see what it’s all about. Even though it’s all Pilates, each piece of equipment you do different things on. It’s a great workout; it’s amazing.”

And while Patrick’s studio doesn’t offer skier-specific classes, she always asks at the beginning of class what sort of athletes might be in attendance, and she’ll throw some extra work that athlete’s way. “If I was working with a skier, I would give them moves from both areas, especially Pilates with the core strengthening it offers,” she explains. “The standing yoga poses are great for leg strengthening.”

Syracuse is fortunate to have a healthy number of yoga studios, and a few of those also offer Pilates. If you try out a place and don’t really connect with the teacher, or her style, move on. Most of them offer drop-in rates, and some, like Patrick’s, have a free class coupon for first-timers only that you can access from her website, cnyfitness.com.

So no matter which studio you choose, if you’re a skier, a series of Pilates or yoga classes will only make your runs through the snow more enjoyable. “Pilates and yoga are such great workouts,” Patrick notes. “I wish more people would experience it. It’s great conditioning work and it can help with the lower body. To me it’s all about preventive maintenance, and I think yoga and Pilates are that. Skiers have so many injuries, we can strengthen your weakness and teach you body control. A lot of skiers need that control.”