

# the scoop

# on the BOSU

the health club staple finds a home as a valuable prop in the pilates studio

BY KRISTINE GRESHAM

One of my biggest challenges as an instructor is getting students to scoop their abs correctly. I know how hard it can be—as late as my third level of training, my teacher was still telling me to engage my powerhouse more intensely. My *a-ha* moment finally came during a workout in which I was playing with different ways to engage my abs. Suddenly I stopped contracting my top muscles so much and instead pulled from the inside.

Of course, discovering something for yourself and explaining it to others are two different things. So I'm always looking for new ways and cues to help students grasp this concept.

Before I became a Pilates instructor, I was a personal trainer, which helps me think outside the box when teaching Pilates. I often use props as teaching aids, and one of my favorites is the Bosu ball (an acronym for both sides utilized). Once I was experimenting with some Pilates moves on it and realized that its instability forces you to engage your powerhouse and work into the transverse abdominal scoop. It also gives you a reference point—something you can pull your tailbone *away from*—and helps the instructor see if you are actually doing it. Another *a-ha* moment!

After students experience the scoop on the Bosu, I tell them to put that feeling into long-term memory so they can re-create it during every Pilates movement. Now many of my students request Bosu workouts. When you divide the number of exercises you can do on a Bosu ball by the mere \$136 it costs, you have a real bargain on your hands. For maximum results, I recommend doing this routine on its own two to three times a week or as a complement to regular matwork.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARTHUR COHEN.  
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# getting the hang of it

Over time we tend to forget how to properly move or engage the correct muscles, and consequently we may feel stress in our neck or discomfort in our joints because the firing pattern of our muscle groups is incorrect. As we develop body awareness, we'll get more out of our exercise programs—and greater results. These first three

exercises are perfect for everyone, especially beginners, because the Bosu serves as a reference to guide the movements properly. The instability of the Bosu will also cause your abs to fire automatically. The first few times you do this routine you'll probably feel a bit awkward, but the more you do it, the easier it will become.



## pelvic lifts

**purpose:** teaches you how to curl the tailbone by engaging the powerhouse

**setup:** Platform of the Bosu is on a flat surface. Sit on the Bosu, lift your hips and lower the small of your back (lumbar spine) onto the front of the Bosu. Bend your knees and keep your feet parallel and flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Cradle your head, palm over palm, keeping your elbows back and wide, neck soft. Lower your upper body down until the tips of your shoulder blades touch the Bosu. Look at your navel.

**1.** Exhale as you scoop the powerhouse to curl the tailbone away from the floor and up toward the navel, peeling your spine slightly off the Bosu.

**2.** Inhale and roll your spine back down on the Bosu and point your tailbone down toward the floor. Do 10–12 repetitions.

**tips:** Keep your head and shoulders lifted and your neck relaxed. Pull your navel down toward your spine as you exhale.



## chest lifts

**purpose:** strengthens the stabilizing muscles of the pelvis while lifting and lowering the upper torso

**setup:** same as previous

**1.** Inhale as you lower your head and chest so that your torso is parallel to the floor.

**2.** Exhale as you bring your chin toward your chest, lifting your head and gazing at your navel. Do 10–12 repetitions.

**tips:** Continue to stabilize the pelvis by drawing your tailbone toward your navel. Maintain the connection of the rib cage to the shoulder blades, making sure to keep your ribs in.

## modified criss-cross

**purpose:** strengthens the obliques

**setup:** Same as in previous. Place your right palm on the side of the Bosu and raise your right leg up parallel to the floor, softly pointing your toes. Your left palm is behind your head, elbow bent.

**1.** Exhale as you scoop your powerhouse in, lift your left armpit up and over toward your right leg while simultaneously bending your right knee in toward your chest.

**2.** Inhale as you extend your right leg parallel to the floor and return the torso to neutral and parallel to the floor. Do 10 repetitions crossing toward the right, and then change sides and repeat.

**tips:** Make sure the rotation comes from your rib cage and abdominals. Continue to stabilize your pelvis by drawing your tailbone toward the ceiling.

**advanced:** Place your right hand on your right hip for a further challenge.



# new challenges

To see progress and change, we must continually challenge the body; a stale workout program delivers stale results. There are several ways to make an exercise more difficult. One way is to do it in an unstable environment. The body will be thrown off, as if it were your first time performing the exercise. I have taken three traditional Pilates exercises and incorporated the Bosu. If you feel like you keep falling off the back, scoot forward just a bit (and vice versa).

## hundred

**purpose:** builds core strength and endurance

**setup:** Platform of the Bosu is on a flat surface. Sitting on the Bosu, place your palms on either side, lift your hips and align your navel on the center of the dome.

**1.** Draw your knees in toward your chest as you place your hands on your shins, fingertips together, feet softly pointed. Engage your powerhouse to curl your tailbone off the Bosu and up toward the ceiling. Bring your chin to your chest and lift your shoulder blades slightly away from the Bosu, drawing them down and back and keeping your collarbones wide.

**2.** Extend your arms long at your sides, wrists flat, fingertips together and shoulders plugged into your shoulder joints. Bring your knees into a Tabletop position, feet still softly pointed. Inhale as you softly pump the arms up and down for 3–5 breaths. (The pumps should be softer because of the challenge of balancing on the Bosu.) Exhale as you softly pump the arms up and down for 3–5 breaths.

**3.** Repeat breathing sequence 10 times, for a total of 100 breaths.

**tip:** Continue to curl the tailbone up toward the ceiling and look at your navel.

**advanced:** Extend your legs up toward the ceiling.



## single-leg stretch

**purpose:** stabilizes the torso while moving from the arms and legs

**setup:** same as previous

1. Place your right hand on your right ankle and your left hand just below your right knee.
2. Extend your left leg out 45 degrees, toes pointed.
3. Inhale and, keeping your chest and shoulders open, bring your right knee firmly into your chest as you reach the left leg long, hugging your right leg

toward your right shoulder.

4. Exhale as you switch legs, pulling the left knee in toward the body and reaching the right leg long. Do 6–10 repetitions.

**tips:** Keep your gaze at your navel, and make sure your elbows remain wide and shoulders relaxed. Pull the heel of your bent leg closely in toward your buttocks.

**modification:** Point your extended leg up toward the ceiling.



## double-leg stretch

**purpose:** strengthens the rib-cage-to-shoulder-blade connection and teaches the body to move in opposition

**setup:** same as previous

1. Inhale and extend your arms and legs up toward the ceiling, feet in Pilates stance and fingertips together as you draw the powerhouse in deeply.

2. Exhale as you sweep your arms around toward your ankles and then draw your knees in toward your chest. Do 6–10 repetitions.

**advanced:** Extend your arms and legs further apart. Press the rib cage down toward your shoulder blades as you extend your arms up toward the ceiling.



# fun and variety

These three exercises are for people of all levels of fitness. They focus on strengthening the powerhouse as well as certain

other larger muscle groups. The more muscle groups that fire during an exercise, the greater the caloric expenditure.



## pilates push-ups

**purpose:** strengthens the upper body and challenges the ability of the body to stabilize

**setup:** Dome is touching the floor. Come to all fours and place your forearms on the center of the platform, parallel and shoulder-width apart.

**1.** Extend your legs behind you in Pilates stance and rise up on your toes. The powerhouse is engaged and your body is reaching in a nice straight line from the head to the heels. Place your palms on the Bosu, fingers pointing forward and together, and lift up into a Plank position.

**2.** Inhale as you bend your elbows. Hug them close to your rib cage as you lower your body down toward the Bosu in a straight line. Exhale as you push your body up and away from the Bosu, keeping your elbows in close. Do 8–10 repetitions.

**tips:** Keep the Bosu as level as possible. Engage your powerhouse and keep your hips level with your torso. Look at the front of the Bosu to keep your head in line with your spine.

◀ **modification:** Lower onto your knees or shorten your range of motion.

## shoulder bridge

**purpose:** teaches how to articulate the spine, stretches the small of the back and strengthens the seat

**setup:** Platform is flat on the floor.

**1.** Lying on your back on the floor, bend your knees a little more than 90 degrees and place your feet flat on the front of the Bosu, arms at your side, fingertips together. Your feet are parallel and relaxed, thighs are touching each other. Anchor your shoulder blades and palms into the floor.

**2.** Inhale as you squeeze your seat to peel your tailbone away from the floor and up toward your navel, one vertebra at a time.

**3.** Continue to peel your spine away from the floor, going all the way up to the tips of your shoulder blades. Hold at the top and reach your tailbone toward the backs of your knees.

**4.** Exhale as you begin to roll back down one vertebra at a time, starting with the top of your spine. Keep your tailbone high throughout the roll. Do 10–12 repetitions.

**tips:** Keep your powerhouse engaged at the top of the movement to prevent arching in the low back (lumbar spine). Draw inner thighs together throughout the entire movement.

**advanced:** Extend one leg up toward the ceiling or place your heels on the front of the Bosu.



## plank tilts



**purpose:** challenges the powerhouse and pelvis in a continuous state of instability; strengthens the inner thighs

**setup:** Dome is touching the floor. Come to all fours and place your forearms on the center platform, parallel and shoulder-width apart. Make fists with your hands, palms facing each other. Extend your legs behind you in Pilates stance and rise up on your toes. The powerhouse is engaged, and your body is reaching in a nice straight line from your head to your heels.

**1.** Inhale as you gradually tilt the Bosu to the right. Exhale as you deeply engage the powerhouse to return the Bosu back to center.

**2.** Inhale as you tilt the Bosu slightly to the left. Exhale as you deeply engage the powerhouse to return the Bosu back to center. Do 6–8 repetitions.

**tips:** Keep your shoulder blades drawn down the back. Work deeply in Pilates stance by zipping up your inner thighs. ☺

The Bosu ball is available at [optp.com](http://optp.com) for \$135.95.

Check out our August newsletter for a bonus move on the Bosu.

For more information on Kristine, go to [perfectformstudio.com](http://perfectformstudio.com).