

Setting your spine in neutral:

Standing:

Feet in line with the hips, toes pointing forward. Press your weight down through the heels then press the big toe and little toe to the ground. Allow your thighs to relax. Tilt the pelvis forwards and back to find the midway position. This should be level (imagine your pelvis as a bucket of water the water is full to the brim and level). Lift your chest bone up (imagine you have a headlight on your chest bone, shine it forwards). Draw your shoulder blades down towards the base of your spine, at the same time as widening through the collar bones. Then lengthen the neck by gently tucking the chin towards the chest (as though you were holding a tennis ball between your chin and chest). Don't look down. Your earlobes should drop behind your collar bones.



Supine:

Lay on your back with your knees bent, heels in line with your bottom and a small towel/cushion under your head. Find neutral with the pelvis by firstly flattening the lower back to the mat. Then arch your lower back by pressing the tailbone to the floor, repeat again, then when you feel comfortable rest your lower back/pelvis somewhere between the two extremes of movement. You should have a small gap in your lower back enough to fit a marble. Keep your lower back rested on the marble. Let your ribcage soften to the floor. Imagine it melting into the mat. Widen your chest, shoulder blades down, then lengthen the neck to rest the imaginary tennis ball between your chin and chest.



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4 Point kneel:

On all 4s keep your hands slightly forwards of the shoulders to ensure the wrists are comfortable. If this is difficult due to wrist pain weight-bear through the fists. Knees should be in line with the hips. Pull your shoulders down away from your ears, then lift the chest to set your shoulders. Find neutral with the pelvis by tilting the pelvis up and down. Tuck the tailbone under, then arch the back, rest somewhere between the two extremes of movement. Make sure as you are setting the pelvis that you keep the chest still.



Prone:

Lay on your tummy, with your head support under your forehead, relax the shoulders down but pull them away from the ears, chin slightly tucked to the chest. Press the pubic bone down to the mat keeping the legs relaxed in line with the hips.



Engage the core:

There are two ways you can imagine doing this either lift the pelvic floor, the muscle you would use if you were needing the toilet, or draw in the lower abdominal muscles. To draw in the lower abdominals pull the area between the tummy button and pubic bone in towards the spine but keep the spine still. The transverse abdominus and pelvic floor muscles co-contact so you can either think about contracting one or the other and they will work together. You need to keep this contraction to a third of what you can maximally contract when you are training in Pilates.

Visualisations:

To contract the pelvic floor muscle imagine the area in contact with the chair when you sit. Visualise the sitting bones, pubic bone (at the front) and tail bone (at the back). Imagine trying to pull those 4 bones together.

Visualise your pelvic floor muscle as a lift inside your pelvis with three floors, maximally contract the muscle to take it to the top floor (level 3). Then take the lift back down to level 1. Level 1 is where you train in Pilates.

Imagine you have a low slung belt around the lower waist area and you want to get it on the next notch to tighten the belt. Draw your lower tummy muscles in towards the spine to fasten the belt tighter.

If you find it really difficult to contract the muscle, try it in all the different positions (setting your spine in neutral) and continue to practice in the position you find easiest.