

pilatesstyle



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YOUR
WAIST**

**WITH RON
FLETCHER'S
TOWELWORK**

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**(AND NECK &
SHOULDERS)**

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KEEP 'EM
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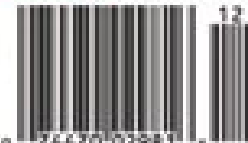
**FROM EARTH-
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- REFORMER MOVES ON ANY OLD CHAIR
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DECEMBER 2010

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terrific towels!

shape your shoulders and tone your torso
with FLETCHER TOWELWORK®

One afternoon in 1971, Pilates master Ron Fletcher was teaching a class in his original studio on the corner of Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Blvd. in Beverly Hills. He asked his students to lift their arms evenly overhead. In attempting this simple movement, recalls Ron, "They made 180 different designs with their bodies, all of them wrong. It was just impossible to get them lined up correctly with their shoulders in the right place."

These imbalanced, asymmetrical and incorrectly initiated movements revealed something shocking yet important: The clients simply didn't understand how to stabilize and lift their arms from the back. In frustration, Ron reached for a studio towel, twisted it into a rope, handed it to one of the women and said, "Now try your damndest to get the towel up in the air and hold it straight overhead." The client did as instructed—and it worked!

Born of necessity, the Fletcher Towelwork®, now a licensed element of the greater Fletcher Pilates program, has been developed and refined over the past four decades. It ranges from simple yet effective movements—designed to improve posture, increase range of motion and stabilize and balance the shoulder girdle—to beautifully complex full-body movement patterns.

Here's how Ron, an original student of Joe and Clara Pilates and longtime Martha Graham dancer, describes the process: "The towel became a tool for me to use at first just to get the arms up straight and the shoulders in line. Almost immediately, I discovered that if we pulled it taut, then released it [i.e., went from closed-chain to open-chain], it would engage a whole group of muscles under the arms, in the triceps and into the back. Plus, I

found that it really felt good!"

Though the towel was initially used just as a prop, its potential applications quickly led Ron to create more and more pieces of movement with it. "Now we can do two hours or more of just Towelwork," he says, "and there's no end to where it can go." In fact today, the full program includes dozens of variations and progressions and has become one of the Fletcher Pilates fundamentals. As Ron observes, "It continues to help people fully engage and feel their upper bodies, to feel the opening of the shoulder girdle, to feel their backs, to lengthen the throat and to be able to, as Martha Graham used to say, really '*present!*'"

To do this basic five-exercise progression—which will strengthen your shoulder girdle, increase shoulder range of motion, strengthen your back and whittle your waist—you can simply use a twisted thin bath towel. But you will find that the Fletcher braided towel provides a much more user-friendly option. It is the perfect length, weight and density for this work, plus it provides just the right amount of give (or elasticity) to work the back muscles without over-stretching the shoulder muscles.

Basic Fletcher Towelwork has many applications. Pilates teachers may choose to incorporate it as a reference in a private session or to warm up a mat or Reformer class. Clients find the patented red towel to be a wonderfully portable home exercise tool to work on shoulder alignment and posture—or simply to warm up for the day.

Today, almost 40 years after its creation, the tool has become so much more than a prop to its thousands of fans and its inventor. "Really," says the 89-year-old icon, "it's just magical."

Fletcher Towelwork® Basics:

Using a thin bath towel:

Fold the towel in half length-wise. Twist the towel until it resembles a rope. Hold the towel at double the width of the shoulder girdle. Be sure to wrap the pinky side of your hand around the towel to more fully engage from the back. Note the shoulder, elbow and wrist alignment.

Using a Fletcher braided towel:

Hold the towel at double the width of the shoulder girdle. Wrap the hands fully around the towel and engage from the back. Note the shoulder, elbow and wrist alignment.

Fletcher towels, along with the full Towelwork program DVD, are available at fletcherpilates.com or through Balanced Body at pilates.com.

workout by Kyria Sabin, director, Fletcher Pilates International modeled by Emily Acre



The Towel man himself, first-generation teacher Ron Fletcher



taut towel pulls

purpose: improves posture; warms up and tones shoulders and upper back

setup: Stand with your legs together and parallel. Lengthen your waistline by lifting your ribs up and out of your hips and gently draw your shoulders down your back. Hold the towel at double the width of your shoulder girdle and lift it to form a horizontal line at chest level.

1. Inhale and, keeping your shoulders pressed down your back, gently pull the towel taut from your midback muscles.

2. Exhale and slowly release. Do 8 repetitions.

3. Now press the towel overhead to the crown of your head and pull the towel taut from this position. Do 8 repetitions.

tips: Pull the towel from the pinky side of your hand to deepen the engagement into your back. Feel a balanced muscular engagement from right and left. Avoid extending/arching the spine and hyperextending your elbows.



pulls to W

purpose: stabilizes and balances shoulder girdle; strengthens the rotator cuff

setup: Same as previous.

1. Inhale as you bend your elbows in toward your body, pulling your arms from your back to form a horizontal W shape at chest level, keeping the towel taut.
2. Exhale to press the towel back out to the starting position. Do 8 repetitions.

VARIATION: ROTATION

1. Repeat step 1. Exhale and rotate your shoulders back and down to press your elbows down toward the floor, forming a vertical W with your arms.
2. Inhale as you rotate your shoulders, reaching your elbows back, and exhale to press the towel forward.
3. Exhale to press the towel back out to starting position. Do 4 repetitions.

VARIATION: WITH OVERHEAD PRESS

1. Repeat step 1 of previous.
2. Inhale as you press the towel overhead. Exhale as you pull it back down to vertical W.
3. Inhale as you rotate to horizontal W. Exhale and press the towel back out to the starting position. Do 4 repetitions.

tips: Reach your elbows wide, as if you were pulling your elbows along an even shelf. Keep the towel pulled taut throughout. Work within a comfortable range of motion, never forcing the shoulders. Think of moving your arms from your back.



**variation:
with
overhead
press**



Continues on p. 51



setup

overhead to U

purpose: stretches upper back; engages serratus anterior

setup: Same as previous, but the towel is pulled taut overhead.

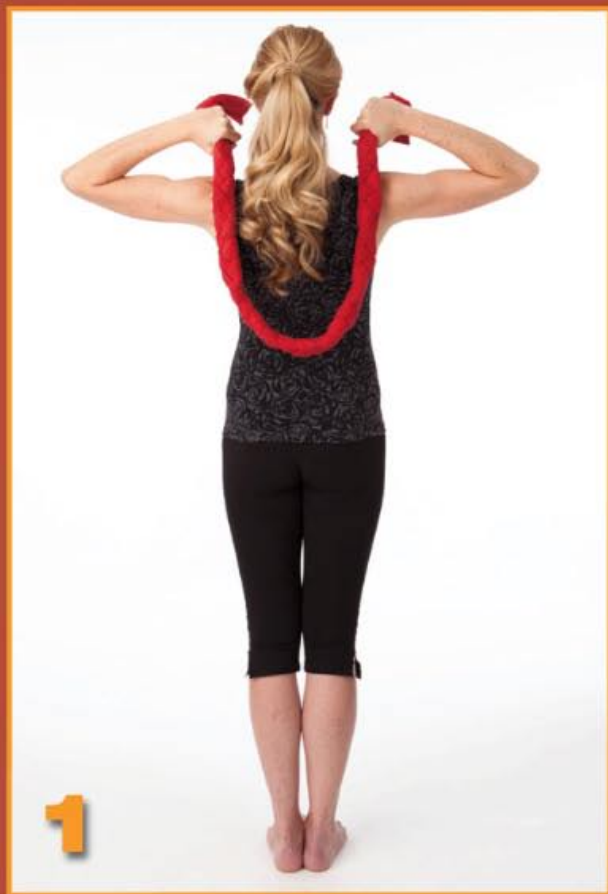
1. Inhale, then exhale, bending your elbows to your sides to release the towel, forming a U shape with your upper back.

2. Inhale and protract the scapula (shoulder blades) forward and away from the spine, pressing your elbows forward.

3. Exhale and retract the scapula toward the spine, expanding your chest.

4. Inhale, then exhale, pulling the towel taut and pressing it back overhead. Do 4 repetitions.

tips: Wrap the scapula forward and around your body to open your back and pull the scapula back and toward the spine to open your chest. Feel the breath guide your movement.



lateral hip stretch

purpose: stretches sideline of body while stabilizing shoulders

setup: Stand with your legs together, heels together, toes apart. Hold the towel at double the width of your shoulder girdle and lift it overhead, pulled taut.

1. Inhale as you lengthen your torso and then exhale, pressing your hips to the right while bending your spine to the left.

2. Inhale, then exhale, pulling your hips and spine back to center. Do 4 repetitions. Repeat on your other side.

tips: Initiate the movement from your hips, pressing your hips in one direction to stretch the spine in the other. Frame your head and neck between your arms and towel, moving the frame from side to side as you side-bend. Allow your inhalation and exhalation to move the body.



contraction to high release

purpose: extends upper back; stretches anterior shoulders and low back; contracts deep abdominals

setup: Stand with your legs together and parallel, the towel pulled taut down behind your hips, palms facing out.

1. Inhale, then exhale and plié, wrapping the towel around your hips and reaching your elbows forward and contracting your belly to the spine.

2. Inhale, then exhale as you lengthen your legs, reaching the towel back as you extend your upper back and lift your chest. Do 4 repetitions.

tips: Initiate the movement by contracting your low belly and stretching your low back. Avoid hyper-extending your neck, low back and elbows on the high release—focus on flexing your low back and extending your upper back. Use the breath to expand your back and chest. ☺

