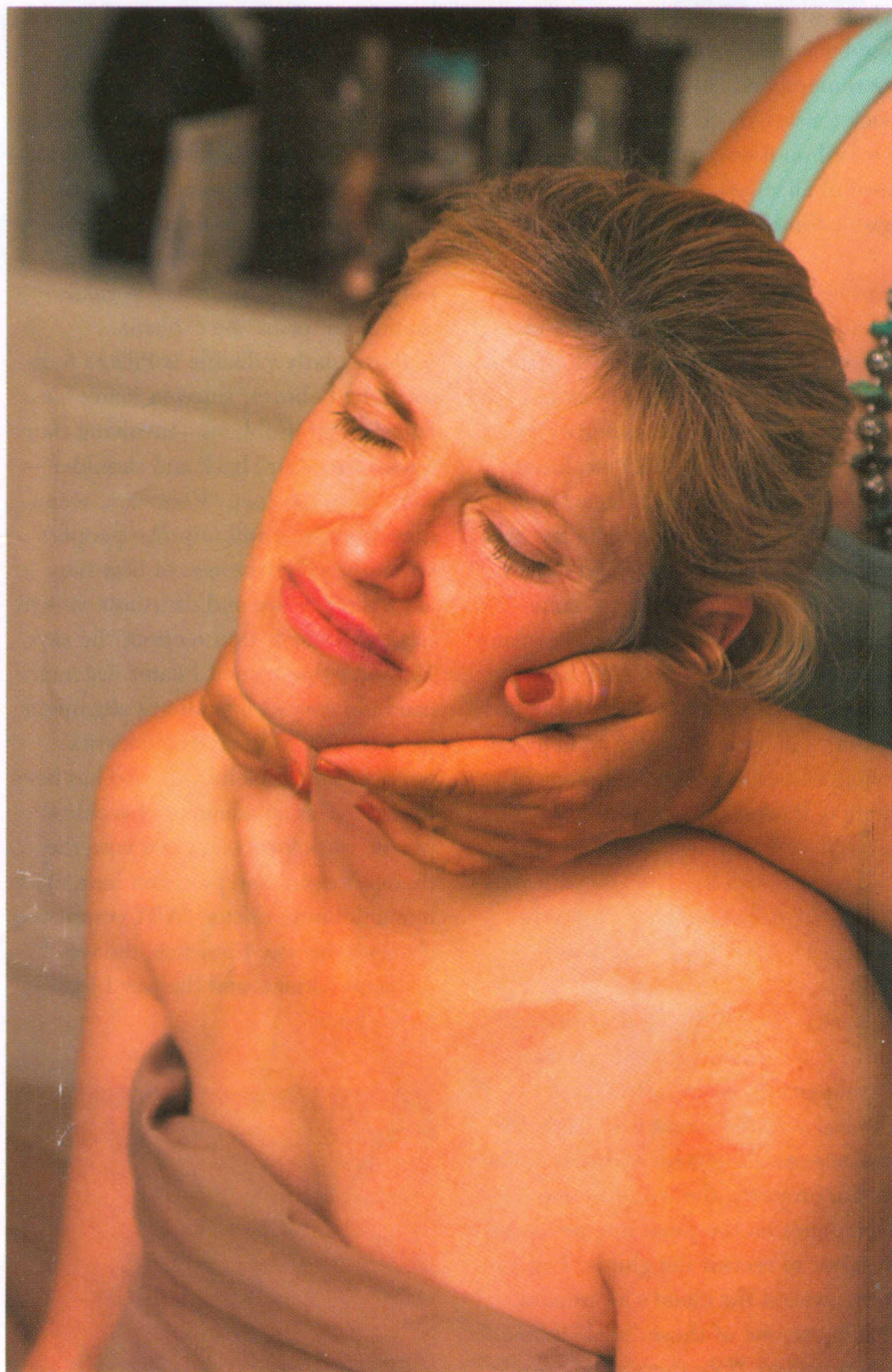


# the ART of healing

*pilates teachers team with active release technique providers in a unique approach to rehabilitating injuries*

BY DEBORAH QUILTER



Imagine the frustration of suffering in pain, searching for help and hearing from your doctors that nothing's wrong—and that they can't help you. This is exactly what happened to Sherry Batrus, a New York sales rep in her 50s who had terrible pain in her right hip. "I'd never been in that much pain. It felt like someone was stabbing me. It was a sharp, angry pain. I had to take three Advil at night just to sleep," Batrus recalls. "I went to an orthopedist, and he said there was nothing wrong with my hip." Then she went to a chiropractor, but that didn't help either.

Finally Batrus went to see Rudy Gehrman, a Brooklyn-based chiropractor, for a session of Active Release Technique (ART), a massage method that treats problems with muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia and nerves. Gehrman determined that Batrus's pain stemmed from a tight hip muscle and used ART to release it. In the second session, Batrus felt her hip muscle give way, and the pain she had lived with for so long suddenly just disappeared. "My muscle was so tight, but when he released it, it felt so loose," she says. Gehrman told Batrus that she could come in for tune-ups, but to remain pain-free, she should do Pilates to keep her muscles long, supple and strong. Though not a fan of exercise, Batrus agreed to try the Pilates regimen—anything to keep that pain from returning.

Today her pain does occasionally return but never to the degree she once experienced. "At least I know what it is and how to deal with it,"

Batrus says, noting that when she feels pain, she knows it's time to amp up her Pilates routine. "I hate exercise," she acknowledges, "but it works. It makes me feel so much better."

### the deal of the ART

Developed in 1985 by Colorado Springs chiropractor P. Michael Leahy, ART is a movement-based massage therapy aimed at removing scar tissue. Leahy was seeing a lot of athletes with soft-tissue injuries that affected their muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia and nerves. He realized he could *feel* the problems when he touched the sore areas, so he set about finding a way to fix them.

Leahy understood that most soft-tissue pain comes from overuse, which can cause small tears to develop and dense scar tissue to form. As scar tissue builds up, muscles become shorter, causing nerve entrapment and putting increased tension on tendons. The result is restricted range of motion, loss of strength and considerable pain.

To counter this, Leahy began using his hands to evaluate and massage the soft tissue while guiding the patient to make very specific movements. This approach developed into what is now ART, a patented system of more than 500 treatment protocols aimed at correcting a wide spectrum of problems. Each session is completely tailored to the individual.

ART begins with a thorough, hands-on evaluation in which a trained practitioner identifies problems in the soft tissue. After determining a course of action, the provider applies gliding pressure to specific soft tissue as he asks the patient to make a movement, such as bending and straightening the elbow. Scar tissue breaks up and becomes more elastic and mobile.

It sounds like it could be painful, but Leahy cautions that if it is, you should find a new provider. "Most people say it 'hurts good,' Leahy insists. It's like massaging

a sore muscle. If it's really painful, it's because the technique is not optimal."

One appealing aspect of ART is the speed in which it works. Unlike some healing practices that require weeks (if not months) of visits to therapists, ART often takes care of the problem in one or two visits. It didn't take long to make a believer out of Lon Black, a 51-year-old animal-massage therapist whose work suffered because of his low-back pain. "ART worked quickly," he remembers. "I didn't need to go back for weekly sessions. My therapist worked on it once and that was it." Best of all, Black adds, "the problem hasn't come back."

### ART-ful pilates

As Sherry Batrus learned, ART and Pilates complement each other beautifully. Because Pilates lengthens and loosens the muscles, it reinforces the ART work. Likewise, ART can hasten progress in Pilates. "You can achieve normal strength and motion in the back and hips faster using ART and Pilates combined rather than Pilates alone—usually four times as fast," Leahy explains. He adds that Pilates and ART have the same goal: getting muscles to function better. "Pilates does such a good job of taking tissue through its full range of motion; it takes full advantage of ART, more than any other form of exercise."

ART can also help people with muscle imbalances do Pilates correctly. Megan Lewis, a triple threat in the ART-meets-Pilates movement, is a physical therapist, ART provider and Pilates instructor at Sports and Orthopedic Leaders in Oakland, CA. If she has a Pilates client who can't, for instance, get the gluteus maximus muscles to fire properly, she will do some ART techniques on the psoas muscle to make it easier to recruit the glutes. This can help awaken the client's awareness, leading to one of those "aha!" moments when you go, "Oh, *there's* the muscle

you wanted me to use!"

Lewis usually assigns Pilates mat exercises as homework to her clients. One of them, Suzette Hibble, has benefited tremendously. "I get the release through ART, and then I can move my body properly and strengthen the right muscles through Pilates. I'm able to contract muscles I didn't have access to before." Pilates, she notes, helps keep her body from going back to old, problematic, habitual movements.

Rudy Gehrman is such a believer in using ART and Pilates together that he tries to persuade all his colleagues to combine the two disciplines. "ART starts to correct motion abnormalities, and Pilates strengthens muscles in full range of motion, restoring normal motion patterns," he explains.

Particularly valuable is Pilates footwork, he believes, since so many musculoskeletal problems—involving the ankle, knee, hip, back and shoulder—stem from the feet. "Footwork, when done correctly, will improve people's strength and awareness of how they align their bones and distribute weight through their feet in motion," he says. He notes that a good Pilates instructor can help correct a student's alignment patterns when doing the footwork.

According to Gehrman, who has been using ART as an adjunct to his chiropractic work for seven years now, the therapy's detail and precision have made him a different doctor. "ART completely changed the way I practice, the way I diagnose patients and the way I look at the body."

### how to find a provider

Ready to give it a try? P. Michael Leahy, the creator of Active Release Technique, suggests looking for an ART-certified provider who is also certified in biomechanics. Visit [activerelease.com](http://activerelease.com) or call 888-396-2727 for a list of providers.