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Setting the Barre

by rhea maze

It's often counterproductive to try and accomplish too much at once. The barre workout, a true Jack-of-all-trades fitness model, defies this logic and manages to deliver significant results by effectively combining several exercise techniques into one class. The magic is in the way it keeps the muscles guessing.

“Barre combines elements of dance, yoga, strength training, Pilates and cardio—all wrapped up in one neat package,” says Ashley Peth, barre instructor at Old Town Athletic Club and owner of Perk! Pilates Fitness.

Charlene Gamino Wilson of Fort Collins has attended four of Peth’s barre classes and is hooked. “I love how each class is different and made up of very precise movements—which is challenging because you have to slow down in order to get them right.”

The term ‘barre’ refers to the stationary handrail that runs along the studio wall and the workout concept evolved from the dance-inspired fitness methods of renowned German ballet dancer Lotte Berk. With the ballet barre serving as an apparatus for balance and support, classes move to the beat of energetic dance music and are comprised of high-intensity intervals, isometric movements, holds, balances and deep stretching. Hand weights, yoga straps, exercise balls and other props are used to vary and intensify the targeted, muscle-strengthening sequences.

“Because you can’t anticipate the day’s moves, you never plateau. And it’s for folks of all ages, sizes, backgrounds and fitness levels,” Peth says. Plus, it’s a blast. Where else can you bust out ballet moves, hip circles, weight repetitions and yoga poses all in one music-packed hour?

“I love trying new workouts and being challenged in different ways,” says Gamino Wilson. “Barre has really improved my posture. And I thought I had strong legs from doing yoga—but after taking just one barre class I discovered muscles I didn’t even know I had.”

Benefits of the barre workout include increased muscle development and lower body fat percentage. “The more you can vary your movements, the better results you’ll see,” says Josh Slattery, personal trainer and co-owner of Old Town Athletic Club. “Barre increases overall strength, flexibility and mobility in a low-impact way while increasing muscle endurance and keeping your heart rate continuously elevated, which helps you become more well-rounded physically. It’s a great addition to any fitness regimen.”

By incorporating moderate weights in ways that protect joints and lengthen muscles, the noticeable strength gains look natural on people. “Barre allows you to develop your muscles appropriately—without overdoing it,” Peth says. And with an ever-changing choreography, barre classes also provide a space for being present and focused. “You can check all the stuff that’s going on in your life at the door and just be in your body for an hour. It’s so rewarding to see people tap into something new through movement.”



Classes offered locally @

- Miramont Lifestyle Fitness, miramontlifestyle.com
- Old Town Athletic Club, oldtown-athleticclub.com
- Perk! Pilates Fitness, perkpf.com
- Pure Barre Studio, purebarre.com/co-fortcollins
- Raintree Athletic Club, raintreeathleticclub.com

Photos courtesy of Old Town Athletic Club.