



Equibalance

Equibalance: Feet Are the Base You Stand On

with Julie Leiken

We are starting with the feet, because they are the base of everything, the support that you stand on.

I am going to demonstrate a series of exercises to encourage movement in your feet and ankles, strengthen your arch and help you find balance over your feet. It's no different than what your farrier does when he shoes your horse; he wants the hoof balanced so that it rolls directly over the center of the hoof, not off to one side or the other. I want the same thing for your foot.

Pilates® Master Teacher Ron Fletcher has divided the foot into three foot centers. (See photo at right.) The first foot center is behind the big toe in the fleshy part of the foot. The second foot center is between the fourth and fifth toe, depending on the size and shape of your foot. The third foot center is in the center of the heel. These three points are the weight-bearing places in the foot.

To find your foot centers, stand with your feet together and lift all of your toes up off the ground. (See photo below, right.) You will quickly be able to feel if you bear more weight on your first two foot centers or back on your

third, or if you are unequal from left to right. Not only will this unevenness affect how you walk, but will also say a lot about how you ride. The following exercises will help you become more balanced over your feet.

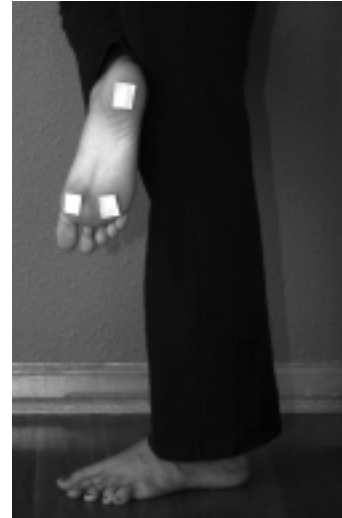
To get the most out of the exercises presented today and in following articles, you must think about resisting the motion as you make it, think about moving through a thick liquid, such as molasses that you have to push through to complete each motion.

Remember that your boot is just there to protect your foot, so when you try to put your heel down, most people only think about putting the boot down. I want you to think about putting your foot centers down because that will start to get you really using your feet and legs, reaching from the back of your hip using the gluteals, through your hamstrings and extending down into your foot. They all reach down into the heel and you want to feel the back of the leg stretch as well as the front.

Practice all of these exercises daily if possible, and then you will be ready for the next article, The Magnets.

For More Information Visit:

www.ronfletcher.com or www.julieleiken.com

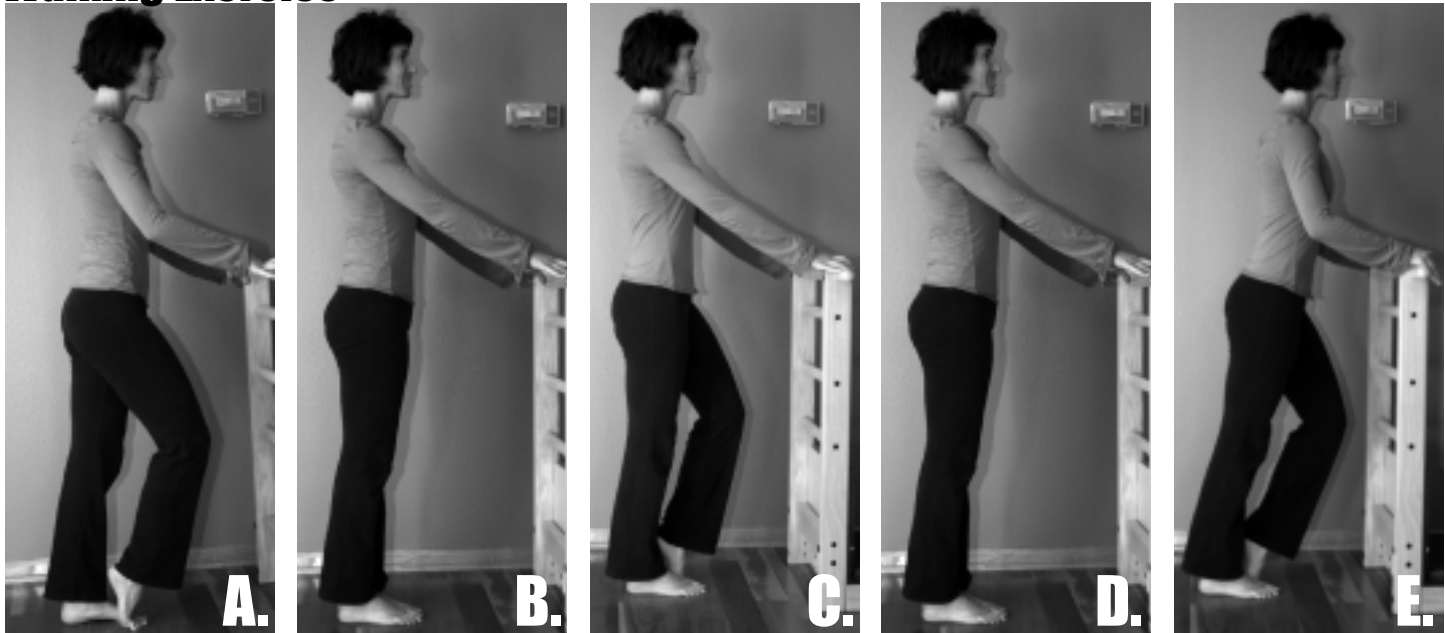


The three foot centers.

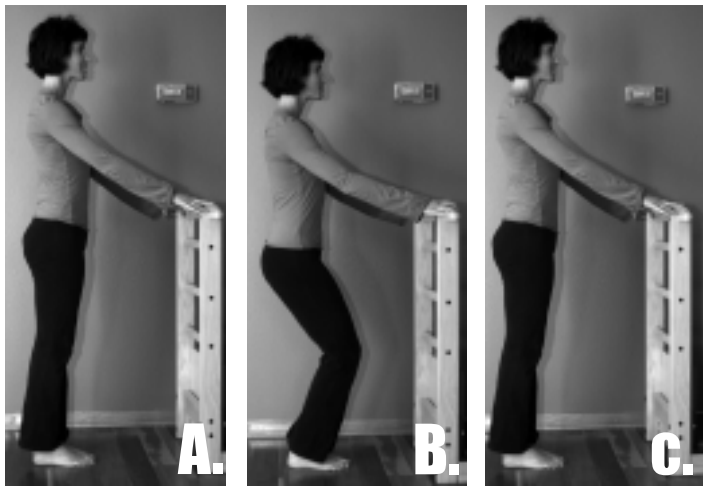


Lifting the toes to find the foot centers.

Walking Exercise



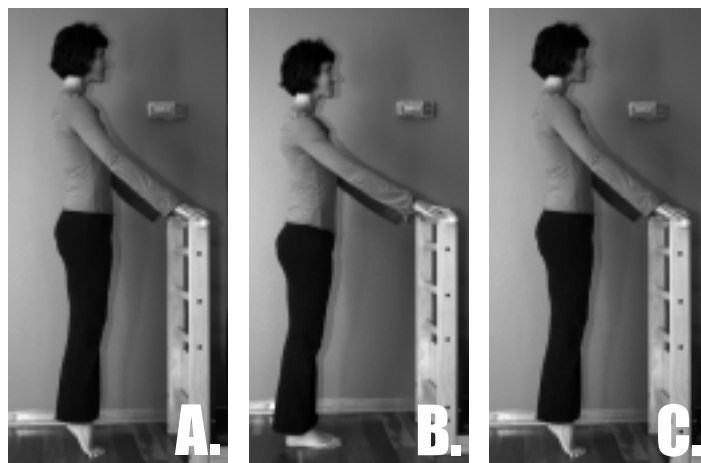
Place your hands on a chair, or fence, anything that will give you a feeling of where you are in space so you do not lean forward. **(A.)** Start by lifting your third foot center and rolling up onto your first two foot centers; really press them into the ground. Pay attention that your knee tracks over your foot in a straight line. **(B.)** Then pull the third foot center down and really press it back down into the ground as you center onto your balance points. **(C.-D.)** Repeat this eight times, alternating feet. **(E.)** An add-on is to lean forward while up on your first two foot centers, getting that extra bit of stretch, then come back to center, and then press the third foot center into the ground.



The Plié

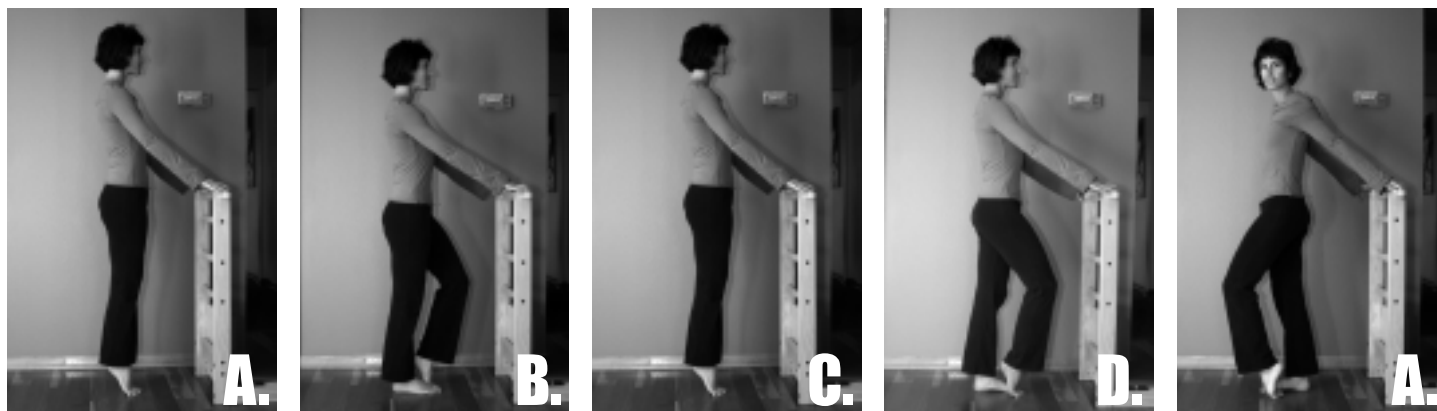
Next we are going to work on stretching the Achilles tendon, this allows us to have full range of motion in our ankles. **(A.)** Start with your weight balanced over your foot centers. **(B.)** Using the idea of oppositional force, bend from the hip, the knee and the ankle, feeling as if someone were holding your upper body up while you plié. Focus on increasing the bend in your ankle joint while maintaining the weight on your third foot center. **(C.)** As you rise up from the plié really use the floor, feeling all three foot centers pressing into the floor.

Think about a pole on a very short merry-go-round horse. The horse is going up and down, and since he is short, you can keep your feet on the ground as the horse goes up and down underneath you. Think about keeping a perfectly aligned position as you ride the horse up and down. Your three foot centers are pressing into the floor as you go down, and pressing even more as you come back up. This will keep your arch nice and lifted, and you should really feel this stretch your Achilles tendon and all through the back of your leg.



The Relevé

Before you do the Stair Climbing Exercise, I want you to practice just lifting (both heels up both third foot centers up) at the same time, pressing into the first two foot centers on both feet, **(A.)** Lift them as high as you can. **(B.)** Then press the third foot centers back to the ground. **(C.)** Lift and lower eight times. Each time imagine staying straight on the pole.



Stair Climbing

(A.) Start in relevé. **(B.)** Press one heel down at a time, keeping the opposite heel lifted high, making sure it doesn't drop down. **(C.)** Lift back up and together. **(D.)** Press down and together. Repeat eight times.

Foot Stretch

Turn around, take the front of your first two foot centers and press those into the ground. Lengthen the front of your leg forward. This will stretch the front of the foot, the shin, and all the way up through the leg.

Flex and Point Your Feet

Sit up as tall as you can. Put your hands behind you to help. **(A.)** Reach your legs out in front of you, and flex your feet, by pulling your toes back. Reach through your heel and really get a stretch through the back of your leg. You will feel this in your hamstrings. **(B.)** Now press the ball of your foot forward. **(C.)** Then reach all 10 toes forward into a point. **(D.)** Pull all ten toes back, then the ball of the foot. **(E.)** Flex at the ankle. Repeat.

