



Think back issues mean you need to stop doing Pilates? Not a chance. These Reformer exercises will help keep your spine protected while you get your groove back.

By Christine Romani-Ruby • Edited by Amanda Altman

I've been very successful in progressing my Pilates' clients with spinal conditions, something I attribute to 25 years of experience as a physical therapist specializing in back and neck pain. My success with this type of client has led to numerous referrals and an overwhelming number of clients with spine conditions at my PHI Pilates Studio over the past three years.

As my schedule exploded with private clients, I realized that I needed to teach my other instructors how to work with these clients, and I needed to create a class setting so these clients could work out more frequently with less expense. That's when I decided to develop the YUR BACK exercise program, YUR being an acronym for "You Under Reconstruction." I began placing each of my spine clients into a category so that I could create a system for proper exercise. Then, I created movement guidelines and exercises that were

appropriate for each category. This allowed me to group spine clients together into a YUR BACK class, or to guide a YUR BACK Pilates instructor during a private session.

The program has been an overwhelming success at my studio—these clients now make up the largest part of our clientele. Many of them have been able to progress from the YUR BACK classes into the regular Pilates program, and they're telling their friends, family and doctors, which is rapidly building our program. Because of the success of the program from both a client satisfaction and a business standpoint, I felt the need to share it with you, the Pilates community.

The YUR BACK program is designed for clients with chronic spine conditions that have completed their physical therapy; it's most successful when performed three times per week. One of the most important factors for the YUR BACK instructor is being able to differentiate good pain from bad pain, so that

they can properly place and progress the client, or refer them back to their doctor if necessary.

For many clients, spine conditions never completely resolve, and this makes it important for the client to learn how to work within their abilities. The purpose of the program is not to relieve spine symptoms—it's to provide a safe workout that will allow the client to resume activity without an increase in their spine symptoms. If clients are left to their own devices, they will limit their activity because of fear of increasing their spine symptoms, and this will lead to deconditioning and other health problems. We call the program "Fitness Without Fear" because we strive to replace the fear factor with knowledge.

The following Reformer exercises are from one of the five YUR BACK categories that I call stability. These exercises are generally safe for all spine conditions because they hold the spine in a stable position, and the Reformer provides the most support and education for the client. Presently, the program is performed on the mat with props, and on the Reformer/Tower; the Pilates Chair and Trap Table programs are in development. YUR BACK is now a licensed program, educating Pilates instructors throughout the U.S. to provide the repertoire to clients in need.

Back away from the recumbent bike—and into the Pilates studio. **PS**

CRAWLING WITH NO ARMS

SETTING: 1 spring (very light)

PROP: none

PURPOSE: promotes flexibility in the latissimus, gluteal and pectoral muscles; challenges the deep abdominal and upper paraspinal muscles; encourages mobility in the hip joint

SETUP: Kneel on the carriage with your knees hip-width apart and feet against the shoulder rests. Place your palms on the footbar wider than your shoulders, and press out so that your arms are straight, spine is neutral and knees are directly under your hips.

1. Inhale, slightly extending your hips, keeping your shoulders and spine stable. Exhale, returning to the starting position. Do 8 reps.

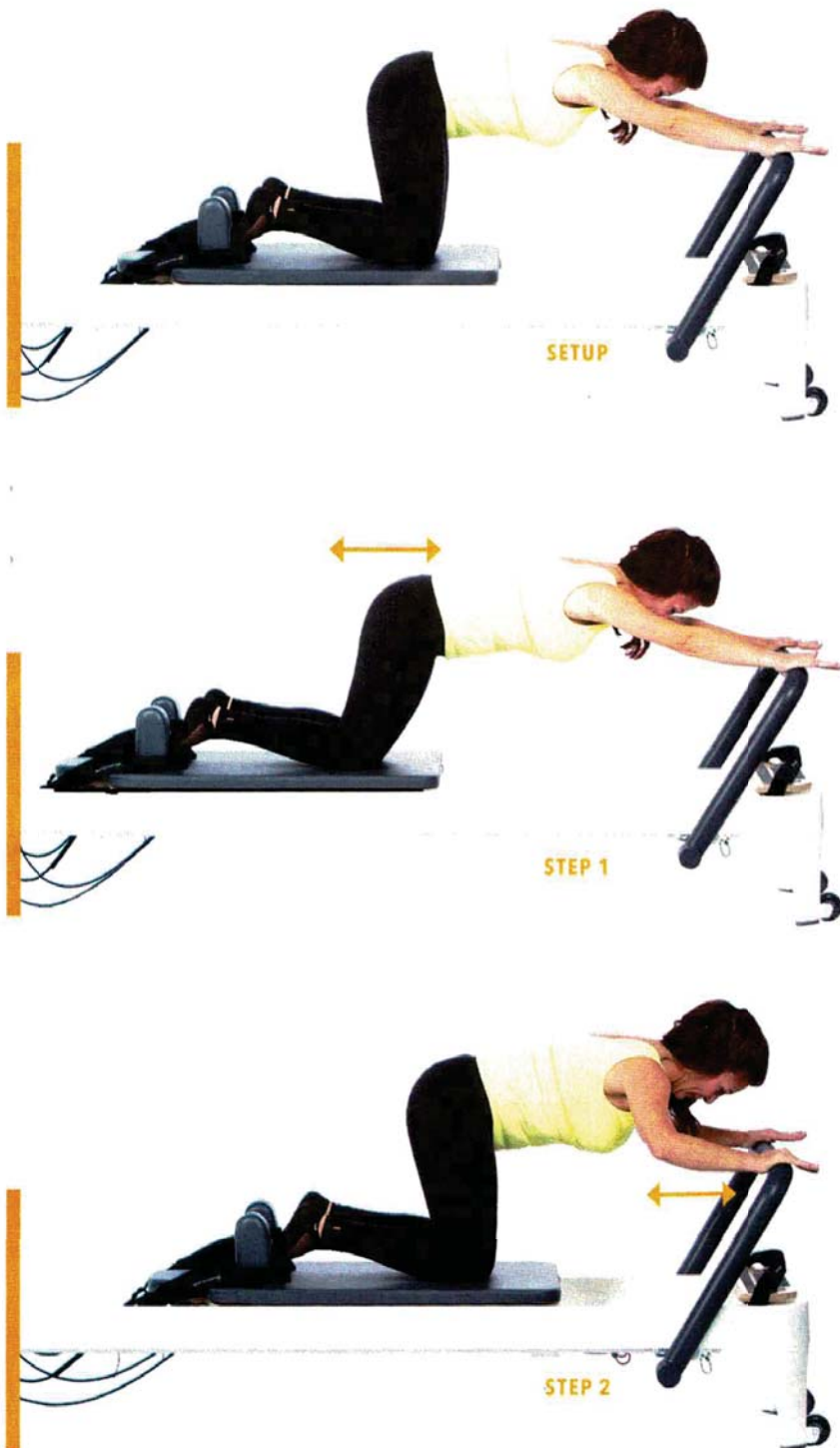
2. Keeping your hips at 90 degrees, do lat pulls with your arms. Do 8 reps with your spine neutral.

TIPS: Your elbows should point outward and slightly downward as you perform the lat pulls. Keep your neck long throughout.

MODIFICATION: Increase the spring resistance.

ADVANCED: Try the exercise with no springs.

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TOWER CALF RAISE

SETTING: light arm springs attached to the roll-down bar, just above shoulder height on the Tower

PROP: none

PURPOSE: enhances stability of the powerhouse; strengthens the calves

SETUP: Stand tall, with your hips neutral and feet as wide as your pelvis, back to the Tower and hands on the roll-down bar. Lean out—as if you were performing a wall push-up—until you feel tension on the springs when your arms are extended.

1. Keeping your shoulders and spine stable, inhale as you perform a calf raise upward and forward.

2. Exhale, returning to the starting position. Do 8 reps.

TIPS: Maintain a neutral wrist, and avoid hyperextension at the elbow. Keep your neck long throughout. The movement of the body should be forward and upward, and the roll-down bar should remain still.

MODIFICATION: Increase the spring resistance.

ADVANCED: Try the exercise while standing on one leg.



Want more back-friendly moves?

Don't miss our e-newsletter for a bonus exercise from Dr. Ruby to open the hips. Sign up for free at www.pilatesstyle.com.



STANDING LAT PRESS

SETTING: light arm springs attached to the roll-down bar, at the highest setting on the Tower

PROP: none

PURPOSE: strengthens the latissimus dorsi; increases awareness of lengthening the spine

SETUP: Stand tall facing the Tower end, with your hands on the roll-down bar. Step back until there is slight tension on the springs when your arms are extended.

1. Keeping your elbows, wrists and spine neutral, inhale, pulling down on the roll-down bar; limit the range of motion to where you can hold the stability in your arms and spine.

2. Exhale, returning to the starting position with control. Do 8 reps.

TIP: Keep your neck long throughout.

MODIFICATION: Decrease the spring resistance.

ADVANCED: Try the exercise while standing on one leg.

FROG WITH BALL

SETTING: 2 springs (medium-heavy)

PROP: 9-inch ball, slightly deflated

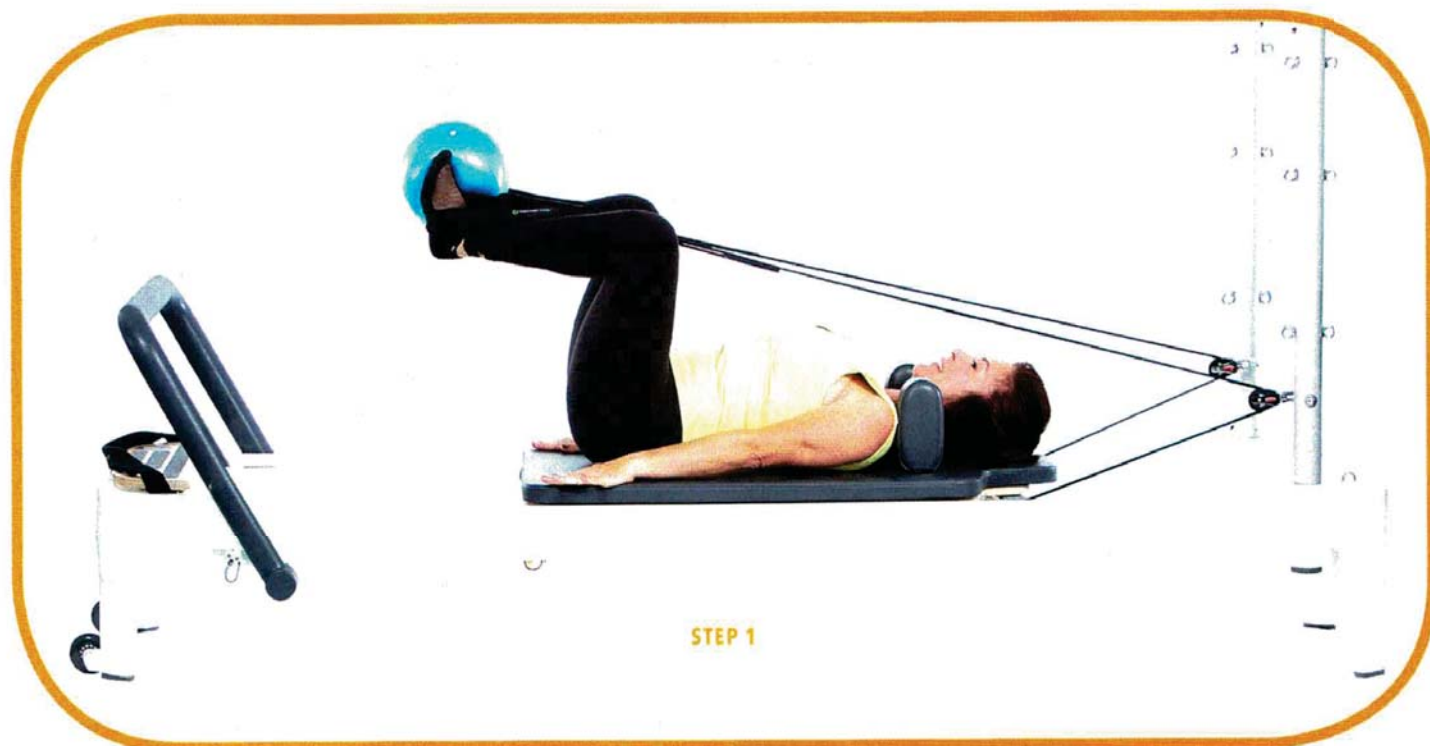
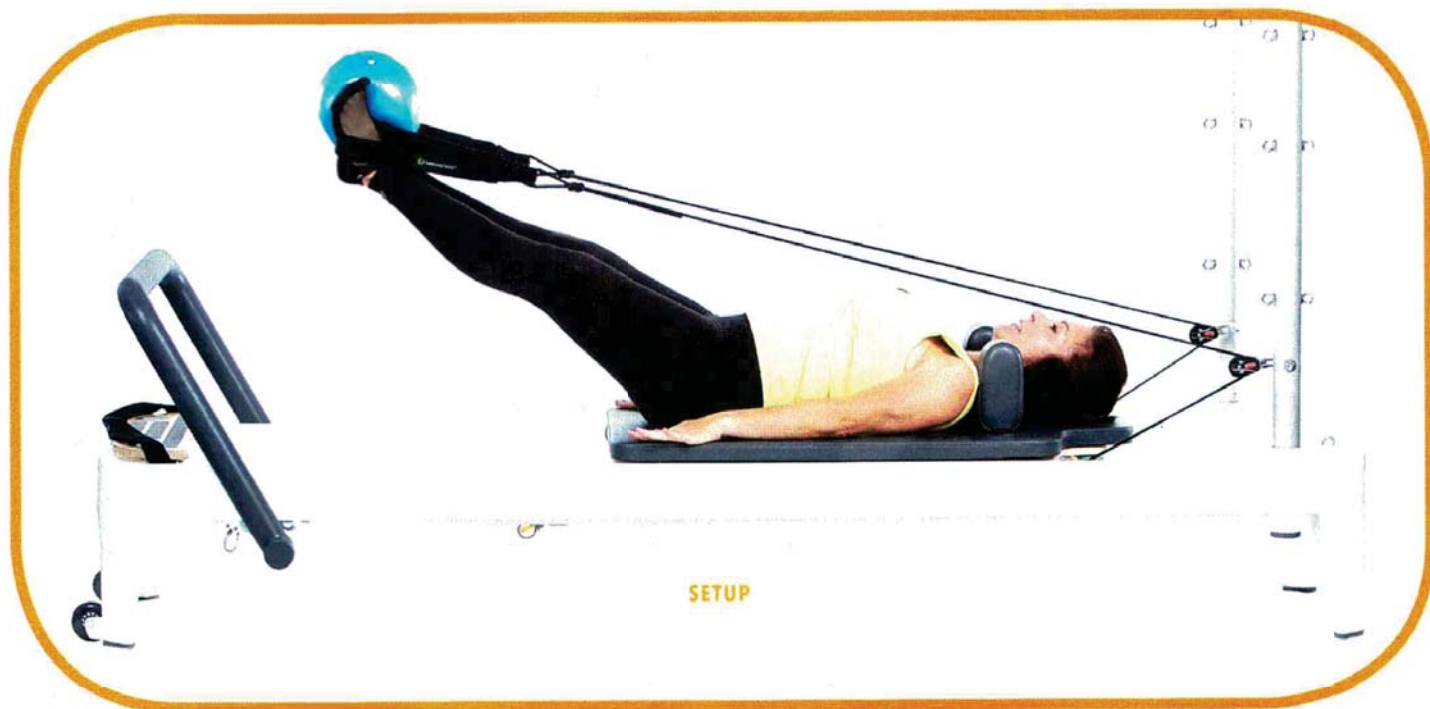
PURPOSE: improves mobility and awareness of the hip joints; strengthens the gluteus maximus without the use of the iliotibial band

SETUP: Lie on the carriage, with your spine and pelvis neutral, feet in the loops, arms by your sides and palms down. Reach your legs to 45 degrees, draw your heels together, and lift your kneecaps to straighten your legs. Place the ball in the V of your feet, pulling back on the little toe sides—imagine that your feet are planted on a wall.

1. Inhale, drawing your knees inward by flexing at your hip joints; maintain the angle of the V at your feet, and keep your knees over your second toes. Only go as far as you can keep your pelvis neutral.

2. Exhale, pressing your legs outward and upward with your heels together to return to the starting position. Do 8 reps.

TIPS: Do not hold the ball with your feet—use it as a spacer to maintain the V. Move your legs along a line where the ropes do not rise or fall during the motion.



GLUTEAL CHALLENGE

SETTING: 2 springs (medium-heavy)

PROP: none

PURPOSE: improves stability and mobility in the hip joints; increases strength in the gluteal muscles

SETUP: Stand to the left of the Reformer facing the footbar, and place your left foot on the floor near the footbar. Hold onto the footbar, and place your right foot on the top edge of the shoulder rest. Bend your left knee, and press the carriage back, bringing your torso in line with the floor, with your spine and pelvis in neutral.

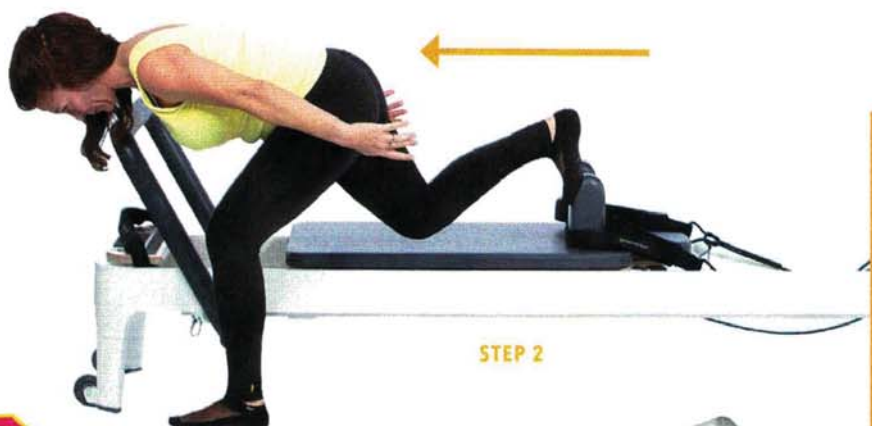
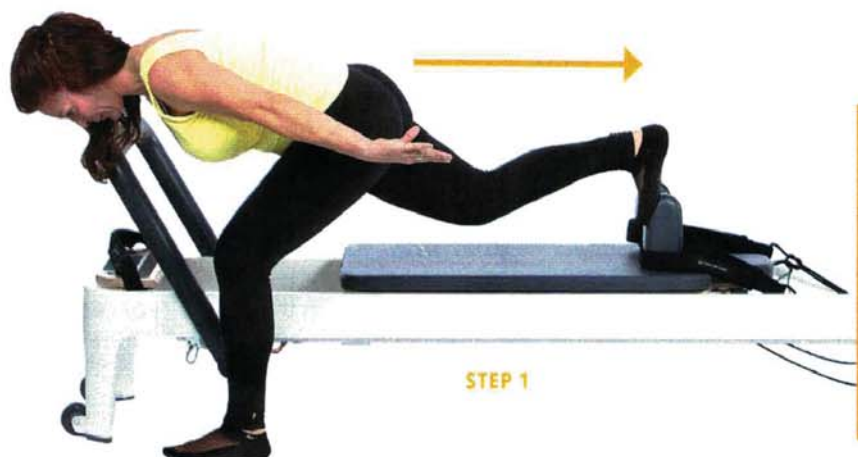
1. Draw your arms back to your sides, then inhale, pushing the carriage out with your right leg while keeping your left leg stable.

2. Exhale, returning the carriage. Do 8 reps on each leg.

TIPS: Maintain a neutral spine and pelvis, and avoid extension in the spine. Keep your neck long throughout.

MODIFICATION: Hold onto the footbar for balance and assistance.

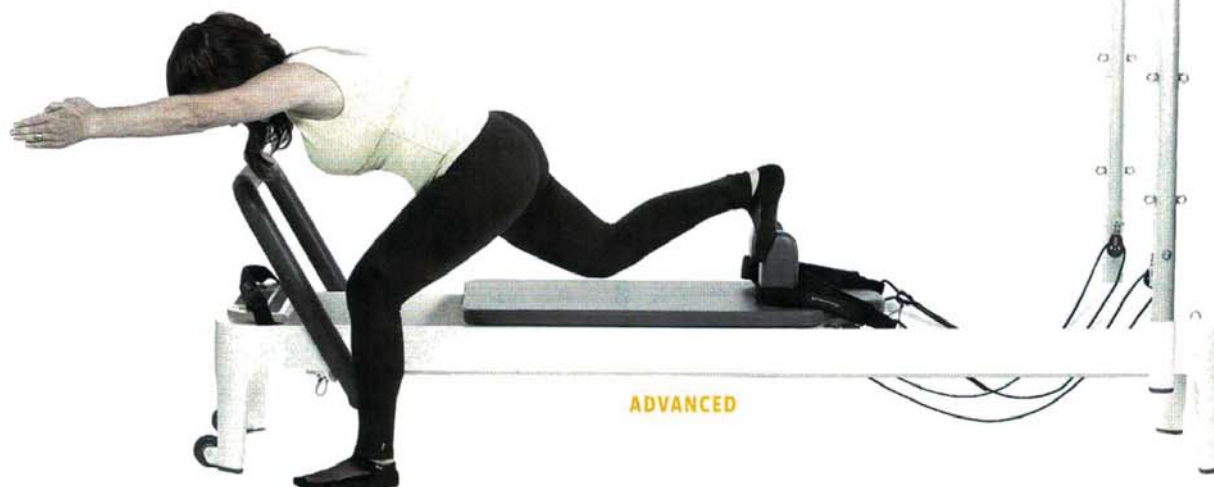
ADVANCED: Extend your arms by your ears to challenge the gluteal muscles.



GEAR GUIDE

Balanced Body Allegro 2 Tower of Power® and Sitting Box (\$4,660 and \$225, respectively; www.pilates.com)

OPTP Soft Gym Overball (\$9.70; www.optp.com)



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LONG SIT ON THE SHORT BOX

SETTING: 1–2 springs (heavy)

PROP: Box

PURPOSE: boosts hamstring flexibility; improves balance in the iliotibial band; challenges the hip flexors and calves

SETUP: Sit tall on the Short Box with the balls of your feet on the footbar, toes pointed, and fingertips on the front edge of the Box for support.

1. Inhale, slightly opening the carriage with your feet flexed. Flex and point your feet, keeping your knees bent and carriage still. Do 8 reps.

2. With your feet flexed, attempt to move the carriage by bending and extending your knees; work through a range of motion where you can maintain a neutral spine and pelvis. Do 8 reps.

TIP: Keep your knees aligned with your second toes throughout.

MODIFICATION: Increase the spring resistance.

ADVANCED: Try the exercise while holding your arms at shoulder height.





SETUP



STEP 1

See it in Action!

Watch Chrissy demonstrate this move at www.pilatesstyle.com.



STEP 3.1



STEP 3.2

ELEPHANT INTO AIRPLANE

SETTING: 2 springs (medium-heavy)

PROP: none

PURPOSE: improves flexibility in the hamstring, calf and latissimus dorsi muscles, challenges the hip and upper-back extensors as well as the shoulder flexors; encourages mobility of the hip and shoulder joints with stability of the powerhouse

SETUP: Stand on the carriage with your hands shoulder-width apart on the footbar, feet directly under your hips and hips bent at 90 degrees. Keep your knees and elbows straight, spine neutral and toes lifted.

1. Inhale, extending your hips to move the carriage, keeping your shoulders and spine stable. Exhale, returning to the starting position. Do 8 reps.

2. Inhale, pushing with your shoulders to move the carriage, keeping your hips and spine stable. Exhale, returning to the starting position. Do 8 reps.

3. Hold the carriage still, and bring your feet together. Reach your right leg back, foot flexed, while holding your spine in neutral. Tap your leg up and down while keeping your knee

straight. Do 5–8 reps on both legs, breathing naturally throughout.

TIP: Keep your spine stable, and your elbows and knees straight throughout.

MODIFICATION: If you have tight hamstrings, widen your stance to the width of the carriage, or add the jumpboard to raise your torso; avoid bending your knees.

ADVANCED: In step 3, try reaching your opposite arm over the footbar.

PRONE SINGLE-ARM CIRCLES

SETTING: 1 spring (medium)

PROP: Box

PURPOSE: encourages stability in the powerhouse; increases strength in the latissimus dorsi, triceps, erector spinae and gluteal muscles

SETUP: Facing the Tower, lie on the Long Box with your chest extended off the Box, spine and pelvis neutral, hips externally rotated, and legs hip-width apart and actively reaching away from you. Grasp the Reformer ropes above the loops, and extend your arms by your sides with neutral wrists.

1. Extend your left arm to shoulder height.

2. Inhale, drawing both arms toward your hips, pulling the ropes.

3. Exhale, releasing the ropes and bringing your left arm toward the floor and your right arm to your side at shoulder height. Do 8 reps, alternating the movement.

TIPS: Maintain a neutral spine and pelvis, and avoid extension in the spine. Keep your neck long throughout.

MODIFICATION: Decrease the spring resistance.

ADVANCED: Increase the spring resistance.



An internationally renowned teacher with 25 years of experience in clinical practice, **CHRISTINE ROMANI-RUBY**, PT, DEd, MPT, ATC, PMA-CPT, has successfully integrated physical therapy and Pilates to create innovative rehabilitation and wellness programs for conditions such as back pain and sport-specific programs for professional athletes. The founder of PHI Pilates in Pittsburgh, PA, Dr. Ruby guides clients in the study of their own movement to improve posture and reduce pain and risk of injury. Dr. Ruby holds a master's of science degree in physical therapy and a doctorate in education. In addition to being an associate professor at California University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Ruby is regularly sought after to speak at national and international conferences, and works daily in her clinic with clients, including NFL athletes, ballerinas and clients recovering from injuries or illness. She has published six books and 18 Pilates DVDs. Dr. Ruby is known for her YUR™ BACK program. For more information, or to find an instructor in your area, visit www.YURBACK.com.