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A Stretch with Pilates

As health professionals, dental hygienists know the importance of maintaining good physical health. But do we follow our own advice? Often, due to the hectic pace of dental hygiene, we do not. Soon, our neglected bodies rebel against us. Pain and limitation of motion set in; doing simple things can become most difficult. Juli Kagan, RDH, MEd, in her program, "Pilates and Stretches for the Dental Professional," offers hygienists and other dental team members the opportunity to learn to reduce pain and improve flexibility — issues that can present themselves from daily misuse of muscles.

The course reviews postural considerations for the seated dental professional including the prevalence of neck and shoulder injuries, spine and hip positioning, neutral seated posture, and the importance of movement. Juli incorporates Pilates and specific exercises and stretches geared for dental professionals, all of which can be done chairside, to help combat bad posture.

Juli also presents a down-to-earth program, "Eating Better for Healthier FUNction. She makes nutrition fun by providing a review of the new USDA food pyramid, "My Pyramid," along with an appraisal of high carbohydrate/high protein diets, and discussions concerning the truth about fats and glycemic loads, including examples of good sources of proteins, carbohydrates, fruits, and vegetables. Juli also incorporates weight loss information, along with helpful daily hints.

The goals of Juli's Pilates program include:

- Identification of the causes of forward flexion of the spine during the seating posture
- Discussion of the prevalence of neck and shoulder injuries for the dental professional
- Explanation of the neutral pelvic position while seated, including neutral spine alignment
- Discussion of strategies for sitting, along with ergonomic tactics for the dental operator to minimize physical strain or injury
- Demonstration of specific exercises for the dental professional that can be performed chairside to help prevent disease or maintain musculoskeletal health

Juli also includes the history, purpose, and goals of Pilates, including studies on its use and the importance of movement during the day. She believes, as many studies have shown, that a majority of dental professionals experience severe spinal and/or neck pain at some point in their career. When one understands the relationships between posture and pain, one can perform more effectively and prevent pain, whether in the dental operator or while working at the computer at home. Being an educator, she provides handouts for the programs, because she knows participants learn best by "doing"; that is, kinesthetically applying the information they gain.

When dental professionals perform the exercises routinely over a few days, they can feel the difference. Once a participant learns the rationale for the stretches and exercises, a behavioral change will occur. Many participants often contact her following a presentation to comment on how much better they feel.

Juli believes she found her true "calling" in life when she began teaching more than 15 years ago. At the time, she was responsible for all of the instrumentation instruction and competencies at Broward Community College. Since 2001, she has been responsible for the ergonomics and instrumentation lectures at Nova Dental School, including periodontal clinical instruction. She found that throughout her programs and teaching assignments, one recurring problem haunted dental hygiene and dental students, as well as many of her colleagues. They experienced postural problems that led to discomfort and pain, even forcing them to leave the profession.

As an exercise enthusiast, Juli became a certified Pilates instructor in 2001, after 600 hours of training. She knew it would be a perfect fit to blend her love of education with her passion for Pilates to help those who were suffering from pain. She brought together her knowledge of dental ergonomics with Pilates-based spinal alignment and posture, and so wrote an entire manuscript for a book dedicated to the dental professional. While writing the manuscript, Juli realized that many other professionals outside of dentistry would also benefit from such information. "Mind Your Body: Pilates for the Seated Professional" was published in 2007. Her continuing-education program is an extension of the book and includes other useful hands-on information specific for the dental professional.

Juli is a graduate of Forsyth School for Dental Hygienists and the University of Maryland with a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene and a minor in kinesiology. In 2003, she earned her master's in educational psychology.

Juli's areas of interest include teaching Pilates and dental hygiene, traveling, and learning. Many of her students, whether in school or during programs, are more than just students; they become mentors, friends, and confidants. Her greatest joy during presentations is seeing the enthusiasm on participants' faces when she shows a stretch or exercise they can do immediately to help relieve pain. Many believe that pain is a way of life in the dental profession, but once they feel the difference, they wonder how they worked without doing the exercises before.

One participant, Joanie Patterson, CDA, RDH, BSDH, wrote of Juli's presentation: "After practicing dental hygiene for nearly 33 years, Juli opened my eyes

to the technology and dynamics that no doctor or physical therapist, has ever taken the time to explain in terms of the whys and hows."

For more information about Juli and her programs, contact her by e-mail at JuliXRSize@aol.com.

"Mind Your Body: Pilates for the Seated Professional" is available at Amazon.com, Borders.com, Barnes&Noble.com, or at Juli's Web site, www.mindyourbody.com.

Author's note: I had the privilege of participating in Juli's Pilates class at Under One Roof in Chicago — she is a great motivator and trainer. I felt the effects of the class for a few days after and wish she lived closer to me to keep me on my toes! Thanks, Juli.

About the Author

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