

The #1 secret to an amazing body

It's Pilates.

And it's way easier than you think. Here, the only workout you need for your best-ever butt, legs, and belly.

By Leslie Goldman
Photography by Tom Rafalovich

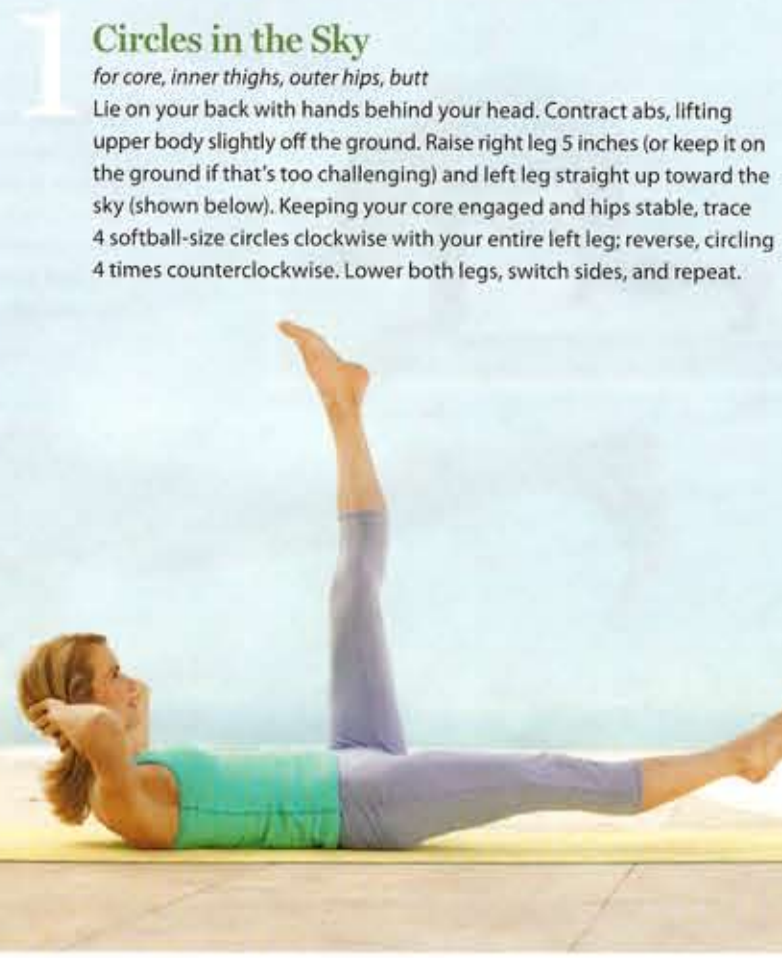


Mat versus machine.
Want to take a Pilates class but aren't sure what kind to choose? Visit Health.com/pilates to find out which one is right for you.
Health.com

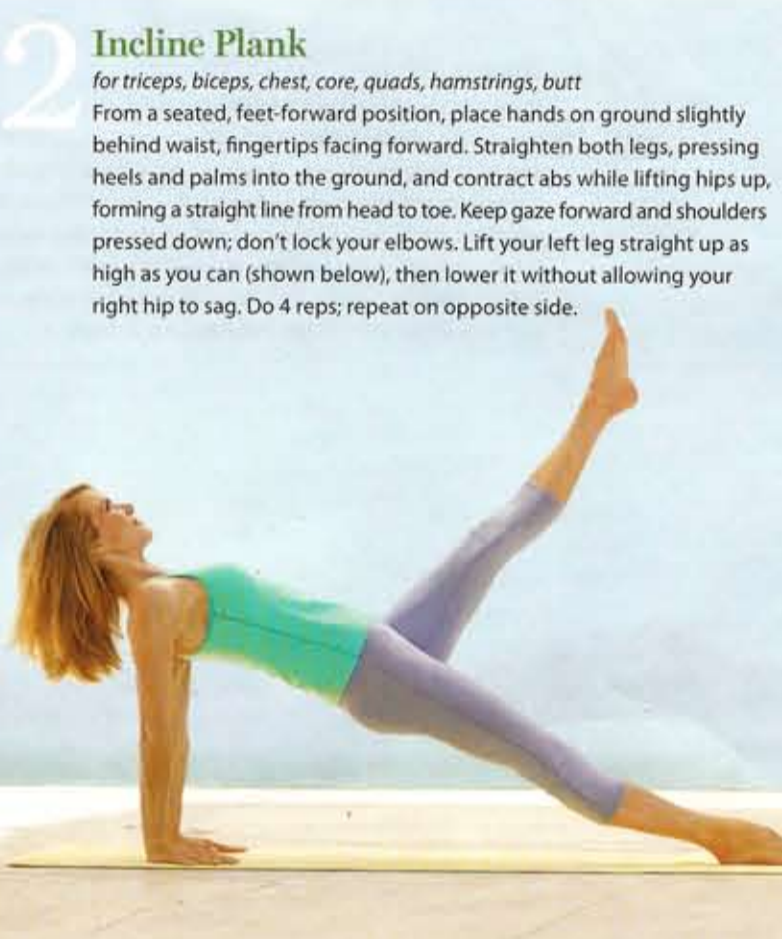
Ever caught yourself staring enviously at the toned abs and tight butt of the woman next to you in the produce section? Chances are, she's getting help from Pilates.

Pilates is *the* workout to turn to for a flat tummy. A 2008 study found that Pilates mat exercises engage and strengthen the deeper ab muscles responsible for a sleek, flat stomach. But Pilates isn't just about whittling your waistline: It can also give you exceptional whole-body toning and graceful posture, plus make your daily activities (like hoisting groceries) easier to do.

Ready to get a Pilates body of your own? We've partnered with New York City-based expert Kristin McGee (her clients include LeAnn Rimes and Soledad O'Brien), shown here, to bring you the ultimate 20-minute Pilates workout. Do it three times a week for a month to drop up to 6 allover inches.



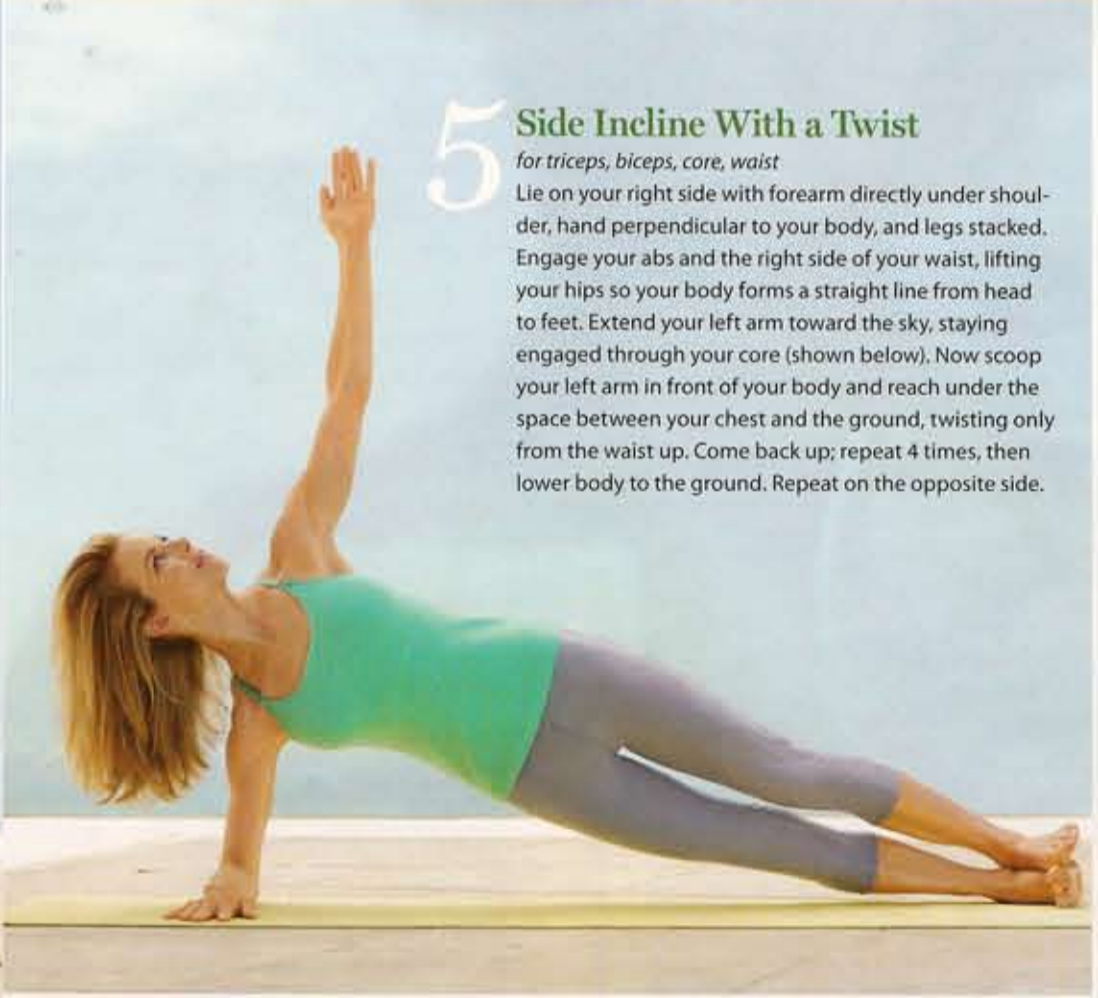
1 Circles in the Sky
for core, inner thighs, outer hips, butt
Lie on your back with hands behind your head. Contract abs, lifting upper body slightly off the ground. Raise right leg 5 inches (or keep it on the ground if that's too challenging) and left leg straight up toward the sky (shown below). Keeping your core engaged and hips stable, trace 4 softball-size circles clockwise with your entire left leg; reverse, circling 4 times counterclockwise. Lower both legs, switch sides, and repeat.



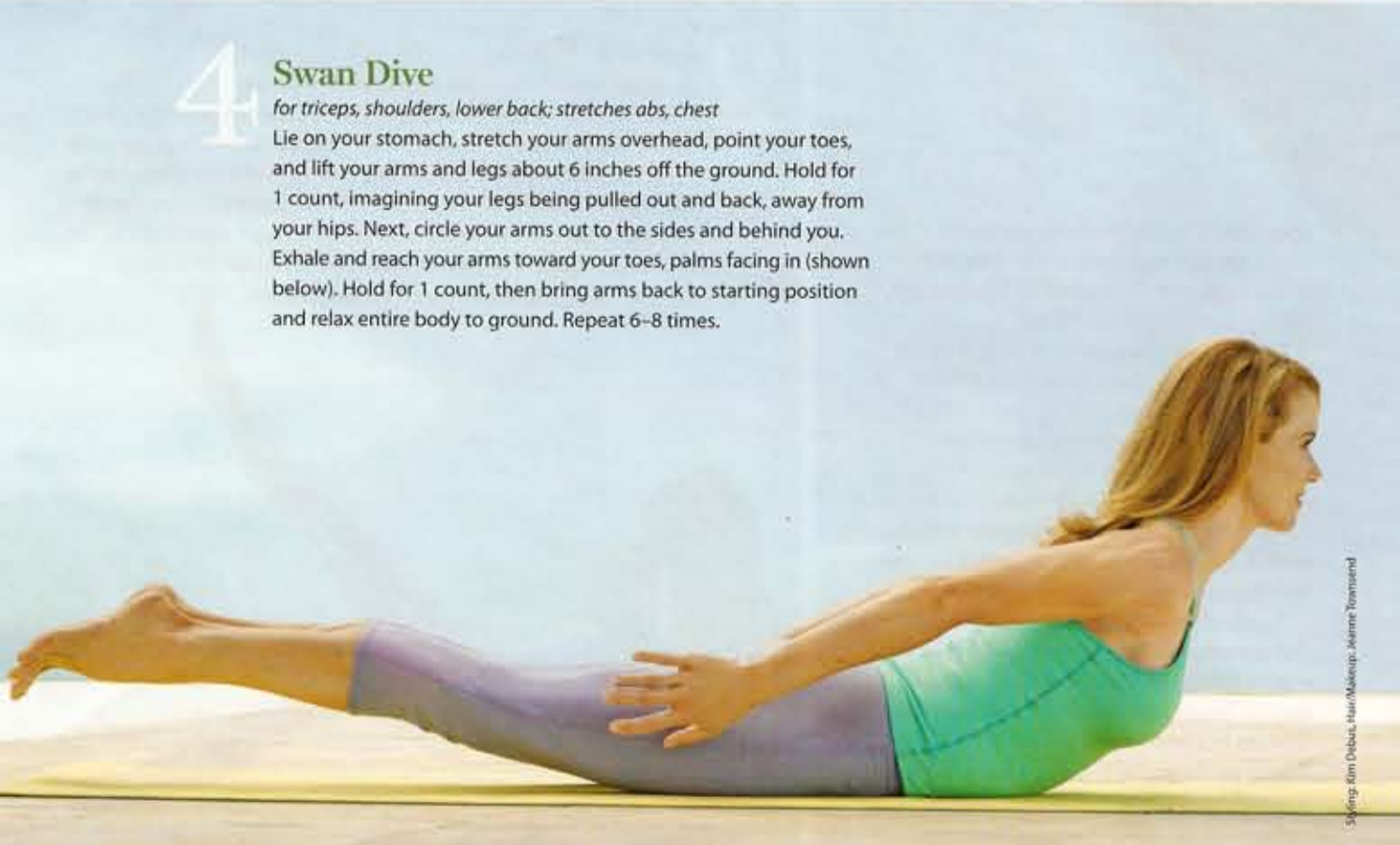
2 Incline Plank
for triceps, biceps, chest, core, quads, hamstrings, butt
From a seated, feet-forward position, place hands on ground slightly behind waist, fingertips facing forward. Straighten both legs, pressing heels and palms into the ground, and contract abs while lifting hips up, forming a straight line from head to toe. Keep gaze forward and shoulders pressed down; don't lock your elbows. Lift your left leg straight up as high as you can (shown below), then lower it without allowing your right hip to sag. Do 4 reps; repeat on opposite side.



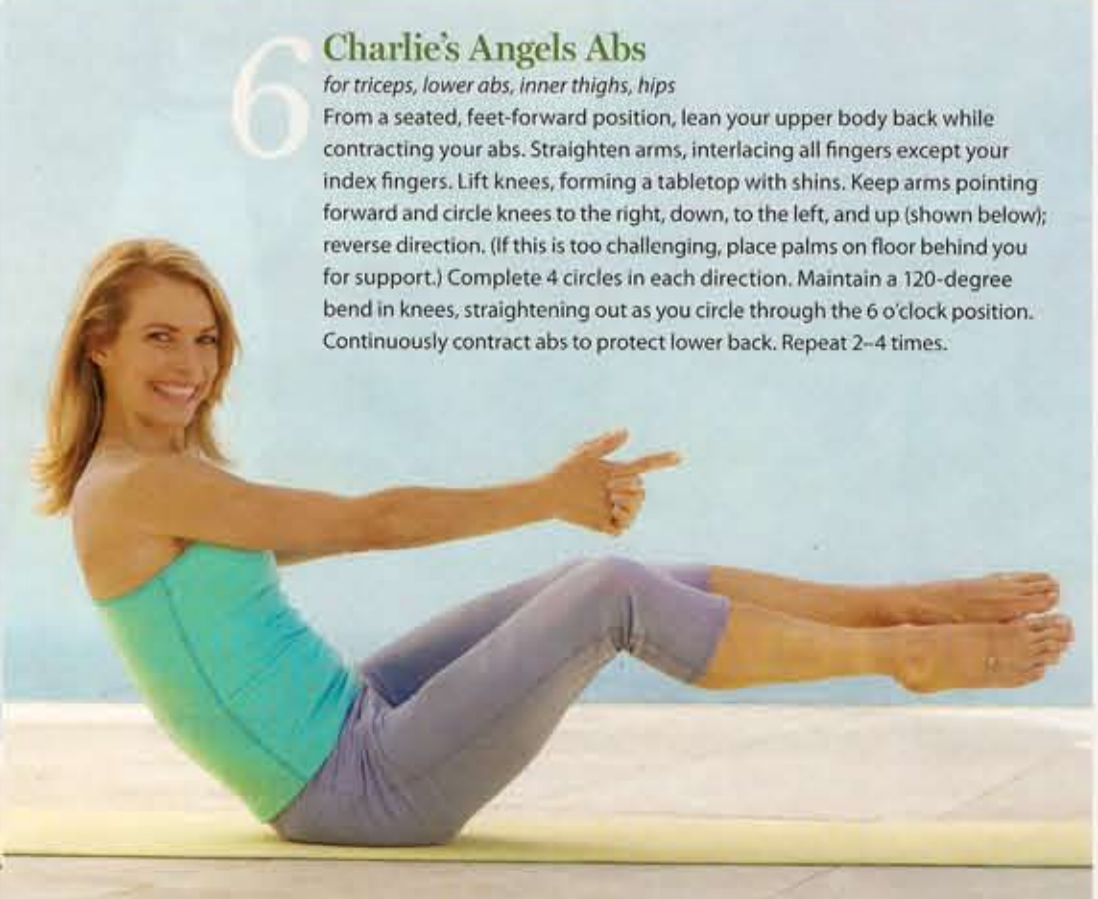
3 Donkey Kickbacks
for triceps, biceps, core, butt, hamstrings, back
Kneel on all fours, toes tucked under, keeping your back neutral. Draw your belly in toward your spine as you contract your abs and lift both knees about 2 inches off the ground. Keeping abs engaged, bring right knee toward nose (shown at left). Then kick right leg straight out behind you, squeezing your butt (shown below); keep lower abs contracted and hips facing the ground to protect your back. Repeat 8 times; switch legs and repeat.



5 Side Incline With a Twist
for triceps, biceps, core, waist
Lie on your right side with forearm directly under shoulder, hand perpendicular to your body, and legs stacked. Engage your abs and the right side of your waist, lifting your hips so your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Extend your left arm toward the sky, staying engaged through your core (shown below). Now scoop your left arm in front of your body and reach under the space between your chest and the ground, twisting only from the waist up. Come back up; repeat 4 times, then lower body to the ground. Repeat on the opposite side.



4 Swan Dive
for triceps, shoulders, lower back; stretches abs, chest
Lie on your stomach, stretch your arms overhead, point your toes, and lift your arms and legs about 6 inches off the ground. Hold for 1 count, imagining your legs being pulled out and back, away from your hips. Next, circle your arms out to the sides and behind you. Exhale and reach your arms toward your toes, palms facing in (shown below). Hold for 1 count, then bring arms back to starting position and relax entire body to ground. Repeat 6-8 times.



6 Charlie's Angels Abs
for triceps, lower abs, inner thighs, hips
From a seated, feet-forward position, lean your upper body back while contracting your abs. Straighten arms, interlacing all fingers except your index fingers. Lift knees, forming a tabletop with shins. Keep arms pointing forward and circle knees to the right, down, to the left, and up (shown below); reverse direction. (If this is too challenging, place palms on floor behind you for support.) Complete 4 circles in each direction. Maintain a 120-degree bend in knees, straightening out as you circle through the 6 o'clock position. Continuously contract abs to protect lower back. Repeat 2-4 times.

All-star Pilates bodies
Is Pilates a must-stop on the road to the red carpet? These celebs think so.



←←← **Liv Tyler**
Pilates helped her regain her gorgeous figure after the birth of her son, Milo.



→→→ **Keri Russell**
Her secret to staying fit while pregnant and trimming down postbaby? You guessed it.



←←← **Sharon Stone**
Pilates has helped keep Ms. Stone, 50, looking toned, terrific—and young.