



# THAT'S A WRAP

Take your Pilates practice to the next level with a versatile wonder prop designed to give you constant feedback.

by Stacy Baker Masand

Jennifer Stacey, an exercise physiologist/biomechanist, Pilates instructor and the owner of Peak Performance Pilates in San Francisco, works with a post-polio patient who has severe osteoarthritis in his upper body and uses walking sticks to ambulate. "He can do so many more of the Pilates repertoire when we use a Stretch-eze band," Stacey explains. "It enables him to perform the Roll-Up and Single-Leg Circles, which he otherwise couldn't do. He also likes it for the Spine Stretch and Saw because it allows him to access his back breathing and helps him roll up to sitting one vertebra at a time using his front muscles rather than his back muscles. It also allows him to keep his legs together and controlled; otherwise I have to hold them or we have to tie them together and lace on a wedge. All in all, it makes his Pilates sessions much more productive."

The Stretch-eze band isn't just for people with physical challenges; it has also helped

athletes like Olympic-gold-medalist-sprinter Sanya Richards-Ross. According to her Pilates teacher of eight years, Wendy LeBlanc-Arbuckle, co-founder of Pilates Center of Austin, "the band completely transformed her ability to decompress, to relax and to allow more mind/body connection."

"We talked about opening her feet so she was using her entire foot [when she ran] and how that related to finding core coordination throughout her whole body. The Stretch-eze band was crucial in allowing her to sense that relationship and use her legs differently, by distributing the work through her fascial system. She could then sense the interrelationship between her feet, inner thighs and the front of her spine to her inner ear. This shifted her habitual pattern of over-using her knees, hips and back, which had led to injury in the past."

LeBlanc-Arbuckle taught Richards-Ross to "stand in the band" with one end of the loop wrapped around her shoulders and the other wrapped around her feet, which allowed the athlete to gently press her arms and feet into the band to "create space" in the joints and fascia. They also used the Stretch-eze for mat moves, including Roll-Up and Single-Leg Roll-Up, Leg Circles, Open-Leg Rocker, Side Kicks and Spinal Twist. "The Stretch-eze changed everything for her!"



## IN THE LOOP

The Stretch-eze band was created by Kimberly Dye, a Balanced Body–certified instructor, dance and movement therapist and owner of Dye-namic Movement Products. The Stretch-eze is a 15-inch-wide soft, stretchy, nylon/Lycra loop of fabric that comes in five sizes to accommodate various client heights. “The idea for Stretch-eze began when I was trying to teach a large class of students, many of whom were deconditioned, how to properly execute a Roll-Up,” Dye explains. “To provide tactile and sensory feedback, I would stand in front of the client, hold their hands and suggest they gently lean away while they used my support to roll up. But it was a challenge to get to everyone and keep the class’ flow.”

This inspired her to create a band students could use that would mimic the hands-on feedback they were getting from Dye. The loop also gave the user the feeling of both being supported and feeling relaxed as if in a cocoon. Dye spent the next five years finding a variety of applications within the Pilates world, in particular in mat classes.

## A NEW CHALLENGE ON THE MAT

One place you’ll find a lot of Stretch-eze bands is at Pilates on Fifth in New York. Kimberly Corp, the studio’s co-owner, uses Stretch-eze to make mat classes more accessible to students, especially if they’re deconditioned or have tightness in certain areas; because so many of her clients work at desks all day, she sees a lot of neck, shoulder and back stiffness. While other props add challenge, Corp finds the support and sensory feedback of the Stretch-eze completely unique.

She and her sister, studio co-owner Katherine Corp, see many benefits for students of all levels. For beginners, it helps students learn the proper starting point for moves, understand the relationship of their core to the rest of the body and feel the opposition when a teacher gives them a cue. This helps them gain more confidence in being able to perform a movement and keep up with the skill level of the class.

“Pilates is designed to mobilize the spine and create strength and flexibility,” says Kimberly Corp. “The Stretch-eze lets you know whether you’re doing a move

# HOME STRETCH

Stretch-eze comes in five sizes, ranging from extra-small to extra-tall, depending on your height. No additional equipment or special gear is required; wear what you would in a typical Pilates or fitness class. One suggestion, though, is to keep your clothing streamlined, recommends Kimberly Corp, co-owner of NYC’s Pilates on Fifth. Hoodies, bulky leg warmers and baggy workout wear can get in the way of the fabric and prevent you from feeling the Stretch-eze against your body.

The bands range from \$26.95 to \$38.95 and are available online at [www.dyenamicmovement.com](http://www.dyenamicmovement.com); [www.pilatesonfifth.com](http://www.pilatesonfifth.com); [www.pilateswithteresa.com](http://www.pilateswithteresa.com); and [www.rolates.com](http://www.rolates.com).

These DVDs are a great way to use the Stretch-eze at home:

**Ultimate Pilates Workouts with Stretch-eze featuring Katherine and Kimberly Corp of Pilates on Fifth** (\$24.95; [www.dyenamicmovement.com](http://www.dyenamicmovement.com))

**BoneSmart Pilates** (\$29.95; at [www.pilateswithteresa.com](http://www.pilateswithteresa.com))

**Pain-Free Pilates with Stretch-eze Level 1** (\$19.95; [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

**Pilates Mat with Stretch-eze** (\$24.95; [www.pilates.com](http://www.pilates.com))

**Stretch-eze for Kids** (\$24.95; [www.dyenamicmovement.com](http://www.dyenamicmovement.com))

**Improved technique and impressive results aside, Stretch-eze just feels good. Between the soft, stretchy fabric and the cocooning effect it creates when wrapped around your body, the prop creates a naturally comforting and relaxing experience.**

right or wrong. Even something as simple as Spine Twist, when you use the Stretch-eze, you can feel whether you’re working deeply enough and can self-correct.”

“Often the idea of stabilization, which is used a lot in Pilates, can be misinterpreted,” explains Mountain View, CA–based Teresa Maldonado Marchok, physical therapist, BASI Pilates teacher and creator of the *BoneSmart Pilates* DVD. “People tighten and become rigid rather than create flexibility in the rest of the body and rib cage so things aren’t locked. But the Stretch-eze provides pressure to give you feedback but also gives your student or client a direct experience of dynamic, energetic pulling toward or away from the body center.”

For veteran students, the band can slow down their movements so they stay engaged and mindful, while avoiding “cheating.”

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** KIMBERLY DYE, CREATOR OF STRETCH-EZE, USES THE BAND IN CHILDREN’S CLASS TO INCREASE CORE STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY, AS WELL AS FOCUS, MEMORY AND CONCENTRATION.

**THIS PAGE:** OLYMPIC-GOLD-MEDALIST-SPRINTER SANYA RICHARDS-ROSS USES THE STRETCH-EZE TO GET A SENSE OF HER FASCIAL SYSTEM AND HELP PREVENT INJURY.

## WHY I LOVE STRETCH-EZE™

Clients of Teresa Maldonado Marchok, physical therapist and Pilates teacher in Mountain View, CA, share how the Stretch-eze has enhanced their Pilates practice.

"After a car accident years ago, I have had chronic neck issues. The Stretch-eze is a lifesaver for me when we do any abdominal/core work on our backs that requires us to lift our shoulders and head off the mat. The Stretch-eze allows me to support and relax my neck much like a hammock so I am able to do the exercises." —*Valerie C.*

"With my arthritis, it's difficult to grip a resistance band, so being able to wrap the Stretch-eze around my wrists helps me to do the mat hip work in a way that's supported yet doesn't hurt my hands. I don't quite have the strength to do the Roll-Up yet, but using the Stretch-eze allows me to experience that exercise in a supported way that makes me feel successful." —*Ann P.*

"As a new student with osteoporosis, the support and stability provided by the Stretch-eze allows me to focus on the exercises and to feel safe." —*Marcia M.*

"I have neck issues and I find the support around my head, neck and shoulders while doing Roll-Ups or other ab exercises very helpful. It takes the strain off my neck and allows me to focus on my abs and proper alignment while performing the exercise." —*Sue H.*



**"That is the brilliance of the Stretch-eze," LeBlanc-Arbuckle points out. "It helps us to feel human movement potential, rather than that we're objects that need to be fixed and trained."**

"Everyone has one or two exercises that are hard for them or a hurdle they're working through," Kimberly Corp adds. "This helps them really feel which muscles they need to be working or adjusting to do those moves correctly." Better technique, she points out, means a better practice and better results.

else in our bodies. "The bones are literally floating in a sea of fascia, which is the tendons, ligaments, muscles, organs," explains LeBlanc-Arbuckle. "The fascia is the net that connects everything, and the Stretch-eze band connects with that. So when we press against it, the band allows the internal connection to our peripheral space without compression."

Improved technique and impressive results aside, Stretch-eze just feels good. Between the soft, stretchy fabric and the cocooning effect it creates when wrapped around your body, the prop creates a naturally comforting and relaxing experience.

**THIS PAGE:** KIMBERLY AND KATHERINE CORP, CO-FOUNDERS OF PILATES ON FIFTH IN NEW YORK, SAY THE STRETCH-EZE HAS STOPPED THEM FROM "CHEATING," ESPECIALLY DURING CHALLENGING MOVES.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** THE STRETCH-EZE CAN HELP ENSURE STUDENTS PERFORM MAT EXERCISES WITH BETTER FORM.

### CREATING BODY AWARENESS

Because the prop is a broad-surfaced loop, "it places the client in a closed-chain position, so he or she can push against it and use it to find their center easily," Stacey says. "They can perform the skill in a biomechanically efficient way, with a lengthened spine and limbs."

It also helps students think of their body holistically. "In Pilates, we choose pieces and parts—pull the belly in and pull the shoulders back," explains LeBlanc-Arbuckle. "But what's more important is if we have a sense of the whole body, and the band helps develop a deeper understanding of how the whole body is connected."

It can also facilitate our understanding of fascia and how they're linked to everything

### HELPING REHAB PATIENTS

Naomi Rayman, owner of Another Planet Pilates in Kentwood, CA, uses it with clients who have joint replacements or tendinitis, noting that its construction allows for gentle and forgiving stretching. "With a yoga strap there's more of a pulling or yanking, but the Stretch-eze delivers an encompassing full-body experience, and the relationship between the upper and lower body is more complete. How many times have we seen people stretch their hamstrings with a strap and their shoulders are tight, their heads are up off the mat and their necks are not in a great position? The average Pilates client is working against the equipment, not with it, but the Stretch-eze teaches them to partner with the band."

Rayman works with an elderly woman with a lot of proprioceptive difficulty after having a hip and knee replacement. "When on the mat, she can't sense her extremities and doesn't know where her feet are. So if I set her up for Bridge using the Stretch-eze, she can feel the medial and lateral edges of her feet, and knows her relationship in space and to her core in a different way."

## **WHO SHOULD STRETCH-EZE?**

While Stretch-eze seems to be most popular with Pilates and yoga teachers, physical therapists, athletes and dancers, the multipurpose prop can easily be incorporated into any classes that involve stretching or resistance. And because this tool provides support, stabilization, feedback and challenge, it's great for everyone—from beginners to seasoned students, healthy exercisers to those recovering from injury, and older clients to elite athletes training for an event.

## **A BAND OF ONE'S OWN**

Using the Stretch-eze at home is the perfect complement to Pilates class work. Kimm Miller, owner of Shillington, PA-based Moxie Pilates,

uses the band with a Pilates client and ultra-marathoner in her late 50s for cross-training and rehabilitation for a hip injury and osteopenia.

"We love using it for Swan, Single-Leg Stretch and Double-Leg Swan," Miller says. "Using Stretch-eze strengthens her back and gives her feedback on alignment and positioning as well as support." Miller says her client also uses the prop



at home on days she doesn't visit the studio. "I'm very hands-on with my clients. The Stretch-eze supports my instruction when they use it on their own—they can feel when a move doesn't feel the same way they learned in class."

You don't need a full one-hour workout to get the benefits. Rayman teaches clients to use the band with their morning stretches. Wrap one end of the band under your feet and the other around your shoulders and then simply stand up straight, she advises. "I love stretching up and rising into it—you feel the lift up the front and the waterfall down your back," she adds. "It's perfect for clients who have rounded shoulders and less connection with their rib cages. And it's a great posture reminder during the day."

"That is the brilliance of the Stretch-eze," LeBlanc-Arbuckle points out. "It helps us to feel human movement potential, rather than that we're objects that need to be fixed and trained." **PS**

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*Stacy Baker Masand is a health, fitness, fashion and beauty writer whose work has appeared in such magazines as InStyle, Self, Shape, Fitness, DuJour and Women's Health. She collaborated with fitness expert Tosca Reno on the New York Times bestseller, Your Best Body Now (Harlequin, 2010), and her latest book, The RxStar Remedy (HarperCollins, 2014), will be available this fall.*