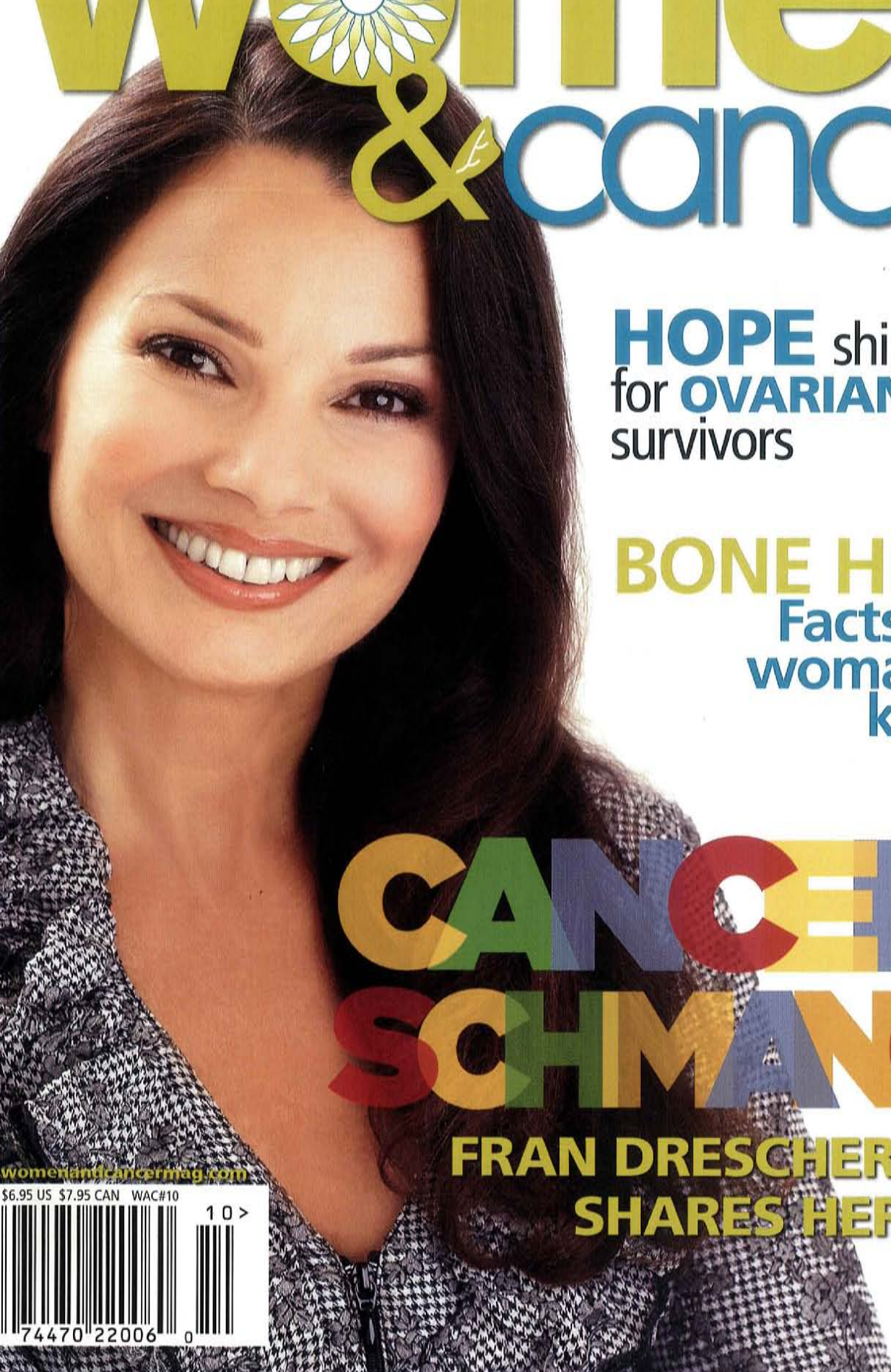


women & cancer



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Powered by Pilates

BY DIANA PRICE

TWO PILATES PROGRAMS CREATED SPECIFICALLY FOR SURVIVORS AIM TO INSTILL CONFIDENCE AND ENHANCE PHYSICAL WELL-BEING.

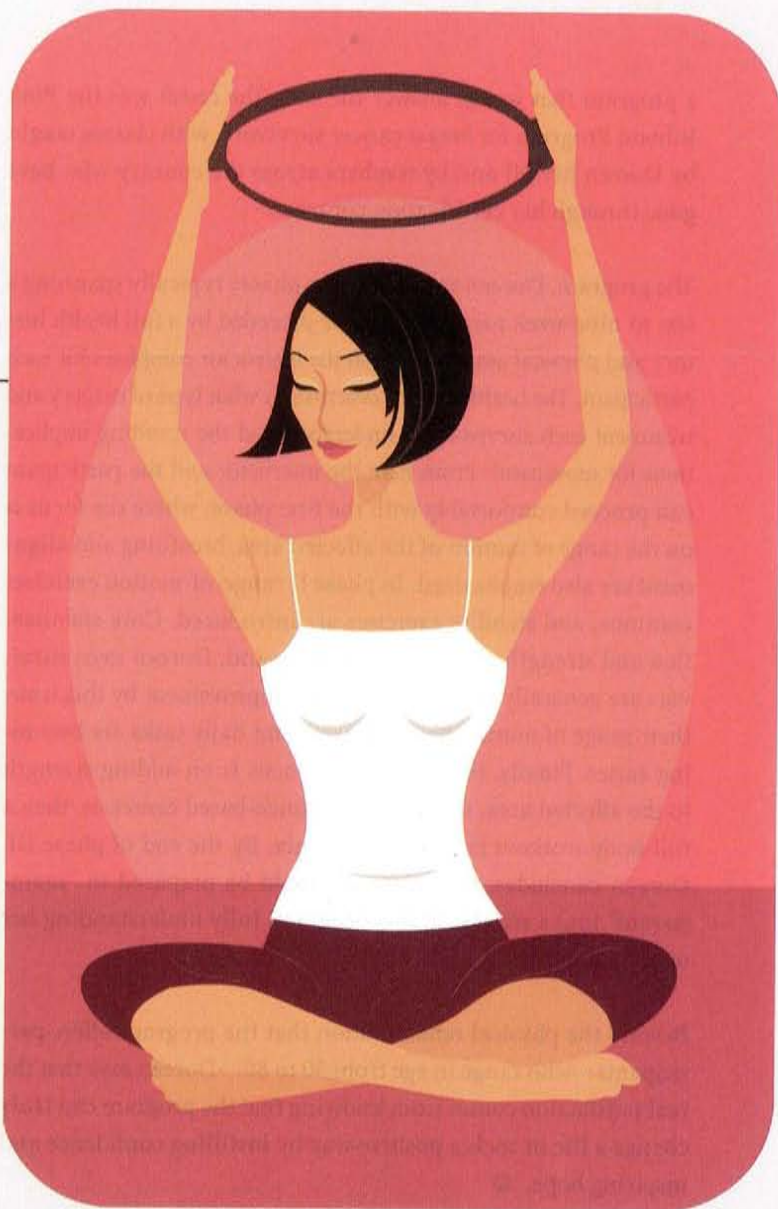
The recovery period that follows breast surgery and other treatments can be a physically uncertain time for breast cancer patients. Often released after surgery with little more direction for their physical rehabilitation than an instruction sheet listing a few exercises, women worry about becoming physically limited by the effects of the surgery and other treatments that have left them feeling fatigued and out of shape. And yet, increasingly, research is showing us that physical activity can benefit women in many ways—physical and emotional—at this critical juncture.

Stepping in to fill the void is a new wave of survivor-minded exercise offerings that seek to meet women where they are and coach them through recovery, instilling confidence, physical ability, and faith in the future. Two programs that have generated enthusiastic followings among survivors are the Pink Ribbon Program (based at the Pilates Center in Fairfield, New Jersey, but offering certification to teachers nationwide) and Lithe Pink at Lithe Pilates in Philadelphia.

The Pink Ribbon Program

Doreen Puglisi's positive experience with the Pink Ribbon Program runs deep. Not only is Doreen the founder of the now-six-year-old exercise program for breast cancer survivors, she is herself a breast cancer survivor who employed the program's protocol to recover after her own mastectomy.

"I had four surgeries in a six-month time frame," Doreen says, referring to the reconstruction schedule that followed her mastectomy. "Each time I had surgery, I used the Pink Ribbon protocol to rehab myself. None of my doctors prescribed physical therapy, and I had lost a great deal of range of motion in the



affected arm. If not for my program, I'm not sure what kind of limitations I would have today."

The lack of rehabilitation protocol for breast cancer survivors surprised Doreen, who has a master's degree in exercise science and has been working in the health and fitness field for more than 15 years. "The medical community has yet to recognize the void that there is between diagnosis and surgery and recovery," Doreen says. "Breast cancer survivors are typically left on their own to find a program and must help themselves with the physical aftermath of a devastating diagnosis; it's rare that a breast cancer survivor will be prescribed physical therapy."

Knowing the great need that existed, from her own experience and from that of clients at the center she founded in 2000 (the Pilates Center, in Fairfield, New Jersey), Doreen set about creating

a program that would answer the call. The result was the Pink Ribbon Program for breast cancer survivors, with classes taught by Doreen herself and by teachers across the country who have gone through her certification course.

The program, Doreen says, has three phases typically spanning a six- to nine-week period, which are preceded by a full health history and physical assessment that the instructor completes for each participant. The health history determines what type of surgery and treatment each survivor has undergone and the resulting implications for movement. From here the instructor and the participant can proceed comfortably with the first phase, where the focus is on the range of motion of the affected area; breathing and alignment are also emphasized. In phase II range-of-motion exercises continue, and stability exercises are introduced. Core stabilization and strength also become a focus; and, Doreen says, survivors are generally exhibiting marked improvement by this time: their range of motion has increased, and daily tasks are becoming easier. Finally, in phase III the focus is on adding strength to the affected area, including resistance-based exercises, then a full-body workout is added to the mix. By the end of phase III, Doreen concludes, the survivor should be prepared to “mainstream” into a regular fitness program, fully understanding her own limitations.

Beyond the physical rehabilitation that the program offers participants—who range in age from 30 to 80—Doreen says that the real satisfaction comes from knowing that the program can truly change a life in such a positive way by instilling confidence and inspiring hope. ❁



Doreen Puglisi

For more information about the Pink Ribbon Program or to find a Pink Ribbon-certified instructor in your area, call (888) 445-3089 or visit www.pinkribbonprogram.com.

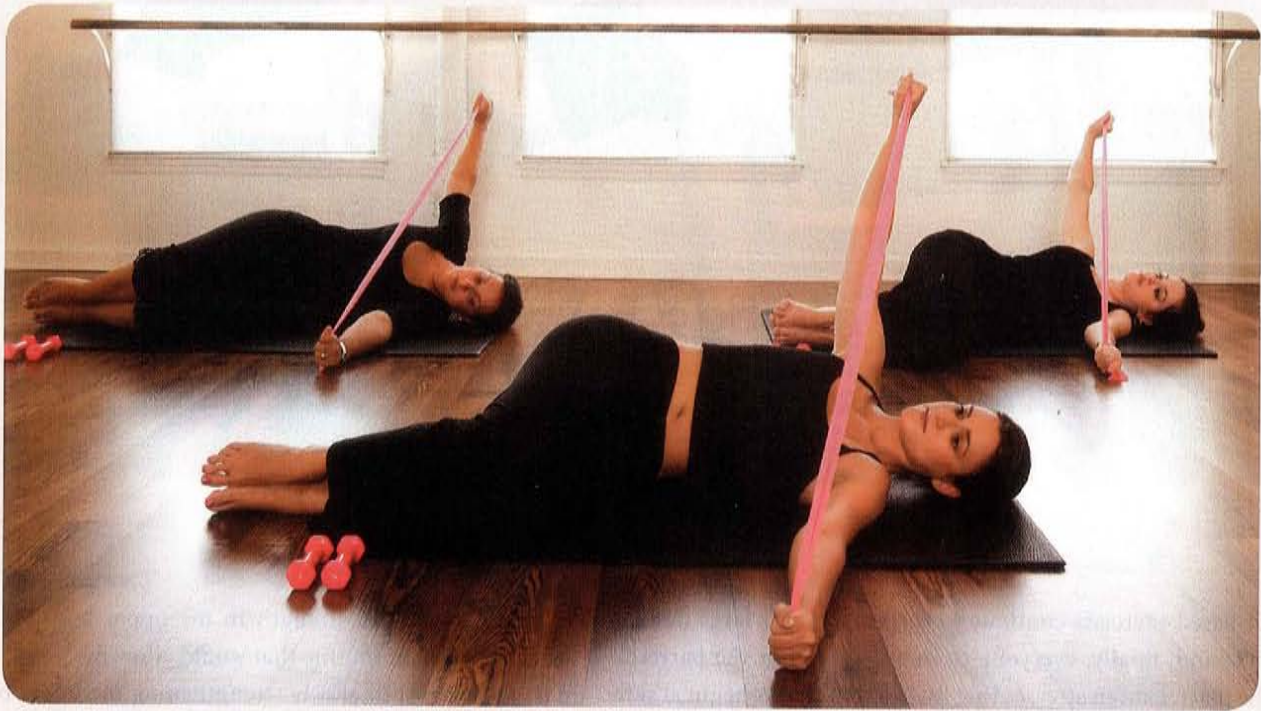
Lithe PINK

Athletes have long known the rehabilitative power of Pilates, and it was in fact her own injury that drew Lithe Method founder Lauren Boggi to the exercises when she was in college. After suffering a rotator cuff injury that sidelined her from her college cheerleading squad, Lauren began studying Pilates as a way to regain strength and mobility. She was immediately hooked on the exercise style and began to modify the traditional Pilates routines to integrate strength training with hand weights, ballet-style barre work, and a cardio component. The unique workout that Lauren developed—and which she has since imported to her own studio in Philadelphia—is called the Lithe Method.

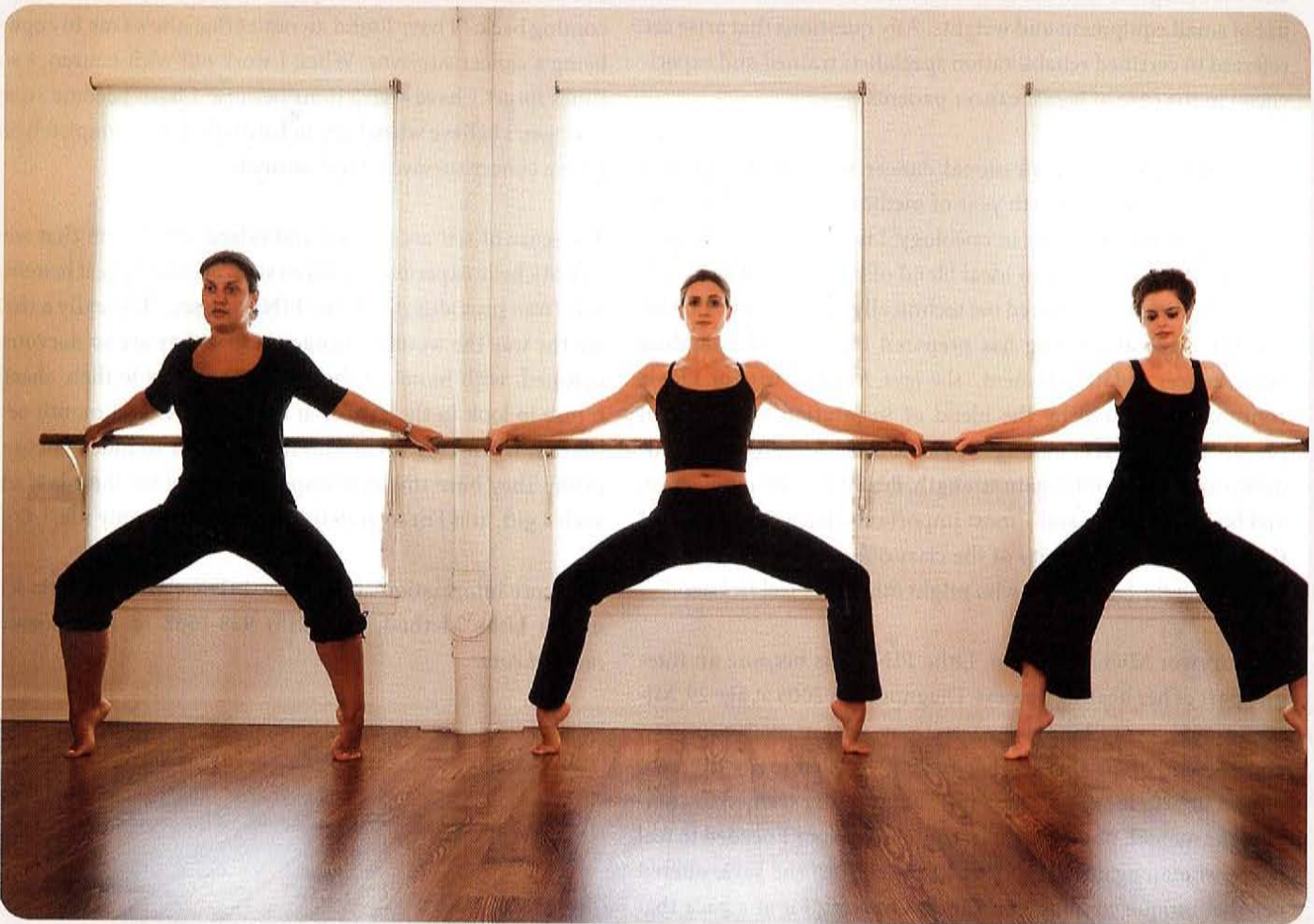
In 2006 Lauren began working with young breast cancer survivor Rachel Troxell. “Rachel is so mentally and physically strong that she kept up with the class despite her pain,” Lauren says. “I used to place a foam roller under her neck among other things to help her get comfortable during the workout.” But Lauren realized that there was more she could do—and that there were many more survivors who could benefit from a class that catered to their needs and offered inspiration along with a good workout.

Lauren’s desire to help survivors like Rachel resulted in Lithe PINK, a specialized fitness program for postoperative breast cancer survivors, melding low-impact weight-bearing cardiovascular exercises, Pilates-evolved strength training with weights, and orthopedic stretching. The use of weights and other small equipment is dependent on each woman and her particular type of surgery and treatment, Lauren says. “Just as every woman is unique, so is her progress of post-surgery healing, her fitness level prior to her surgery, and her current state of health. We really take everything into consideration when we program the PINK class.”

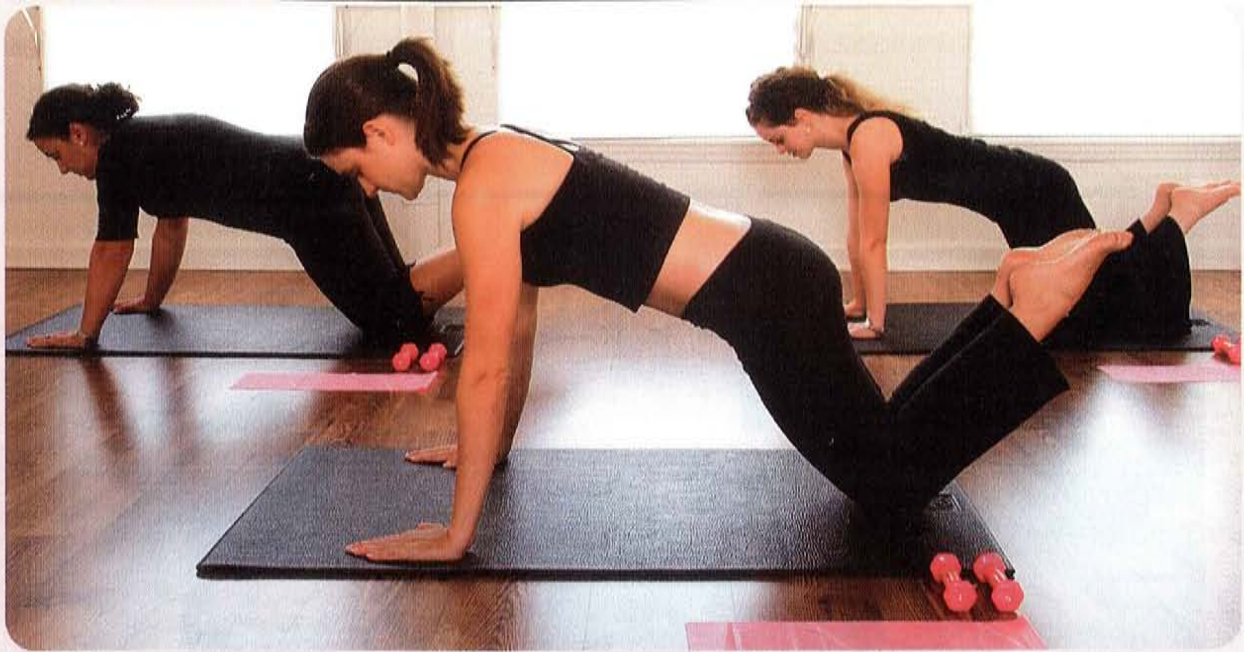
In general, PINK classes begin on padded floor mats as the instructor takes participants through warm-up exercises that incorporate deep breathing and engage the abdominal and pelvic muscles (known as the “core”). It is a combination of Pilates-based core work and strength training using 1-pound weighted balls and resistance bands to strengthen, stretch, and elongate the muscles. Next the class heads to the ballet barre, where isometric



Lithe PINK resistance band work



Lithe PINK barre work



Lithe PINK mat work

ballet-based exercises continue to work the body's large muscle groups; and, finally, everyone stretches—either at the barre or on the mats. Lauren stresses that instructors always begin at safe and appropriate levels, taking each woman's needs into account, and that progress is made gradually with the exercises and the use of small equipment and weights. Any questions that arise are referred to certified rehabilitation specialists trained and experienced in the care of breast cancer patients.

Lisa Smith, a former professional dancer who also teaches the PINK class, is in her fourth year of medical school and is interested in pursuing a career in oncology. Lisa's work with participants in the class offers an ideal blend of her two passions: "My dance training has prepared me technically for teaching at Lithe, and my medical training has prepared me for understanding breast cancer and its treatment," she says. As an instructor, Lisa is continually inspired by the blend of inspiration and physical progress that she sees among the PINK class veterans. "It's wonderful to see the women gain strength, flexibility, self-confidence, and body awareness and—most important—have fun doing it! I think that the community of the class offers social support and interaction for [survivors] who might otherwise feel isolated."

For survivor Michelle Glynn, Lithe PINK has become an integral part of her healing process. Diagnosed in 2005 at age 29, Michelle underwent a bilateral mastectomy, reconstructive surgery, and chemotherapy that left her reeling. "I tried many different outlets to help me cope," she says, "but nothing seemed to combine the mental, physical, and emotional balance I needed to feel like a woman again." The Lithe PINK classes, she says, offered her that unique combination she was looking for at a pace that her weakened body could handle.

Having basically no strength in my upper body," she says, "I needed a workout routine that would allow me to push my body in some areas while slowly strengthening the upper body." And while the physical transformation that the workout has provided has been incredible, it is the psychological impact that keeps her coming back: "I have found an outlet that allows me to cope with being a cancer survivor. When I work out with Lauren, I sometimes forget I have restrictions because I have become so much stronger. I believe when I am in Lauren's class I completely forget I am a cancer survivor. I feel normal."

The sense of self-acceptance and raised self-esteem that women like Michelle experience, Lauren says, are the biggest benefits she gets from providing the Lithe PINK classes. "It's really a thrill to see the way the women change. At first they are so nervous and defeated, with hunched shoulders. They'll hide their chest and refuse to look in the mirror at the barre. After a month or two, I love it when I see them walking tall with so much energy and pride. They have this new respect and love for their bodies. It's such a gift, and I'm so grateful to have them in my life." ❁

For more information about Lithe PINK classes in Philadelphia or the Lithe Method, call (215) 928-1662 or visit www.lithe-method.com.