

disk-go fever!

simulate apparatus moves in this challenging gliding disk workout

BY VERONICA COMBS

Have you ever been lured into one of those unrealistic fitness infomercials promising you the perfect body in a matter of weeks?

Throughout my decade of teaching, I've seen tons of props and devices hit the market with a frenzy but just as quickly fade into obscurity. ▶



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While new gadgets and methods continue to come and go, classical Pilates endures the test of time. My experience, as a Power Pilates senior-level instructor and teacher trainer and the Pilates director of Telos Fitness Center in Dallas, has taught me that there is a fine line between challenging my clients with props and distracting them from their primary goals of movement with concentration, control and precision. I strive to abide by the wisdom of my mentors, Bob Liekens and Susan Moran-Perich, who stressed “creative application of classical innovation.”

That said, one tool has held my interest—gliding disks. Not only do they allow me to practice classical movements with a modern twist, but they create just the right amount of resistance to work targeted-muscle groups. I find them to be excellent for defining abs and sculpting shoulders and legs. They may look like ordinary Frisbees, but don't let the disks fool you—they can provide an enormous challenge to your powerhouse.

Conveniently, gliding disks can be used on both hardwood floors and carpeted surfaces. Adding this simple prop will open up a whole new vocabulary on the mat, allowing you to replicate apparatus exercises. Plus their portability is perfect for frequent travelers and for home studios. If you like this idea, but don't have, or want to buy the disks, you can use two regular hand towels or washcloths.

The following workout blends classical exercises with an inspired outlook to simulate work done on the Reformer and Wunda Chair. Whether you're an instructor or a student, this routine will jazz up your ordinary repertoire. The only caveats: This isn't for beginners. Gliding disks are best for intermediate to advanced students who already have strong cores, since the tool requires good control and stability. Also make sure to check that the resistance is being added at the proper angle for the body to maintain form and refrain from using if you have neck, lower-back or shoulder injuries.

tendon stretch

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair and Reformer versions

muscles targeted: abs, shoulder stabilizers

setup: Sit on the front edge of the mat, with your arms by your hips, elbows slightly bent and palms pressing down. Extend your legs forward and together, then place a gliding disk under each heel.

1. Pressing down with your hands, dive your head forward toward your knees.
2. Scoop your abs and lift your seat off the mat, pulling your seat toward the ceiling while sliding your heels (and the disks) closer toward you.
3. Do 5–8 reps.

tip

If you have difficulty pressing down on your hands, find an elevated surface (such as a raised mat) so your feet begin below hip level.





swan

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair version

muscles targeted: extensors of the upper back, shoulder stabilizers

setup: Lie on your stomach with your arms extended forward in a V shape, palms down. Legs should be long and together on the mat. Place a disk beneath each palm.

1. Squeezing the shoulder blades, press lightly on the disks and come forward and up, the upper body moving in one piece. The disks should slide on the floor toward you as you extend, applying resistance to the upper back-muscles.

modification

Keep your forehead on the mat and practice elevating and depressing the shoulder blades on the back while putting slight pressure on the disks. This works the upper back without thoracic extension.

mermaid

purpose: simulates Reformer version, accomplishes side bending and stretches the obliques

muscles targeted: lats, back extensors, arm abductors, abs

setup: Sit with both legs stacked to your right side, knees bent and close to the body. Hold your ankles with your right hand and extend your left arm up by your ear.

1. With your palms facing inward, reach your left arm up and over from your waist toward your bent legs. Do 3 reps on each side, timing the stretch with your breath (inhale to sit tall, exhale to stretch over), each one progressing into a deeper stretch.

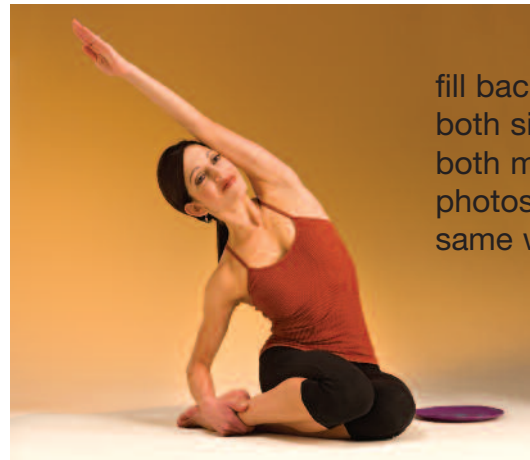
2. To counter your stretch, place your left palm on a gliding disk and carefully glide out to a challenging but safe distance from the body, keeping your arm straight and elbows soft.

3. Using the shoulder blade stabilizers and arm abductors, gliding back up to a seated position.

4. Repeat 3 times per side.

tip

Make sure to glide out only to a safe distance—with your hand out only to a 45 degree angle from your hip—to ensure that the shoulder joint is not compromised.



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mountain climber/knee stretch

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair and Reformer versions

muscles targeted: abs, shoulder stabilizers, hip flexors, glutes, quadriceps

setup: Place the gliding disks under your toes. Get on your hands and knees, keeping your hands right under the shoulders and the knees under the hips, with your palms facing down.

1. Lift both knees off the floor and vigorously pull your right knee into your chest, as you slide the disks back and forth.

2. Do up to 20 reps.

tip

Keep your hips low to get the maximum burn in the thighs and glutes.



front lunge

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair version

muscles targeted: glutes, quadriceps, adductors, trunk stabilizers

setup: Stand with your legs parallel and hip-distance apart and place a disk beneath your right foot, arms stacked and crossed in front of your chest genie style.

1. Glide your right leg back behind you at a slight outward angle while maintaining a straight leg. Allow the body to bend forward so there is a straight line running from the crown of your head to your heel. Your left knee is bent, but make sure it does not go past your toes.

2. Pulling against the resistance of the disk, glide your right leg back up to a standing position.

3. Do 8–10 repetitions then switch legs.

tip
Make sure your gliding leg remains straight to avoid stress in the knee joints and lumbar spine.





side lunge variation

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair version

muscles targeted: glutes, quadriceps, adductors, trunk stabilizers

setup: Stand with your legs parallel and slightly apart and place a disk beneath your right foot, arms stacked and crossed in front of your chest genie style.

1. Glide your right leg out to the side while allowing your torso to bend slightly forward so that your collarbones are in front of your hip bones. Your left knee is slightly bent, but make sure it does not go past your toes.
2. Using the inner thighs, glide back up to a standing position.
3. Repeat 8-10 repetitions then switch legs.



front support into pull-ups

purpose: simulates Wunda Chair version

muscles targeted: abs, hip flexors, shoulder stabilizers

setup: Stand with your legs slightly apart, hands by your side and the disks beneath your toes. Lower your hands to the floor, walking out into a Plank position, making sure your abs are engaged and your wrists are directly beneath your shoulders.

1. Keeping your arms in position, glide your legs forward toward the body as you lift your hips straight up to the ceiling.
2. Slide your legs back out to a Plank position.
3. Do 5–8 reps.

● modification

When sliding your legs in, bend your knees to decrease the difficulty. You can also perform the exercise on your elbows if you have a wrist injury or pull your legs in at a smaller degree.





long/down/ up stretch combination

purpose: simulates Long Stretch on the Reformer

muscles targeted: abs, hip flexors, shoulder stabilizers

setup: Start standing with the disks beneath your feet. Lower your hands to the floor and walk out into a Plank position, making sure your abs are engaged and your wrists are directly beneath your shoulders.

1. Glide your body back and forth 3 to 5 inches, maintaining the Long Stretch position. Do 3 reps.
2. Glide back to start and lower your hips, lifting your chest and pulling forward as you gaze upward, like in Down Stretch.
3. Lift your hips, pulling your feet toward your wrists and dive your head down to the Up-stretch position, like you are simulating an inverted V.
4. Press back out into Long Stretch.
5. Repeat entire sequence 3–5 times.

modification

Keep the movement continuous and make sure to keep your powerhouse engaged to protect the lower back.

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