

# Moves of the Month

for

Perfecting

the

Pull-Up

Nail this challenging exercise within the Pilates environment with the Barnett Pull-Ups Program.

By Larkin Barnett, edited by Amanda Altman



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONNER ALLEN © 2018; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JENNIFER HALL; TOP BY ATHLETA, BOTTOMS BY LULULEMON

### I'VE GOT A REAL PASSION FOR PULL-UPS.

Doesn't it seem like they're a movement that someone who's in shape should be able to do? But they're hard—I mean *really* hard. When you finally pull your forehead over the bar with your whole body engaged, it's both empowering and fun. Not to mention it could potentially help save your life someday.

The original Pilates method includes an exercise called the Pull Up, but it's performed hanging horizontally from the Cadillac bars with the lower body partially supported. Fifteen years ago I wondered, *How can vertical pull-ups be added to the existing Pilates repertoire?* That's when I got the idea to use the Wunda Chair, in conjunction with a pull-up bar, like the Gravitron machine at the gym. I've found that the springs provide the necessary assistance to help conquer the vertical pull-up.

When the goal is tangible, yet challenging, you push yourself in new ways. My proprietary Barnett Pull-Ups Program highlighted here is integral to my Athletickinetics System, which trains the body in a well-rounded, Pilates-evolved 3D system.

Once you master my pull-up variations, you'll get better at push-ups, planks and side planks. Your whole body has to be engaged, so an added benefit is stronger biceps, lats, shoulders, glutes and core. If you do any type of cardio, you'll also notice increased stamina because of your newfound internal muscular strength. Another pro: a postural lift.

This tangible functional strength you'll gain from learning to execute the pull-up is a metaphor for feeling like you can power your way through any part of life. If you can get your forehead over the bar, you can set higher and higher life goals—and reach them!



## Safety First

Before doing any of these exercises, read these rules.

1. Place the Chair on a non-skid surface with the pedal at a slight angle to the pull-up bar for proper body alignment.
2. It's unsafe to lean your body weight backwards. Pull straight up and down.
3. Always have someone spot the Chair.
4. You will need a pull-up bar. Don't use the outside, upper bars of the Cadillac for vertically body-aligned pull-ups. The Cadillac isn't stable enough and could tip over. Also, using the Chair in combination with the Cadillac bars is not safe due to improper body alignment and equipment stability.

### IN MEMORIAM

My friend and Pilates instructor Shelley Hengesh lost her courageous battle with cancer. Her passion was Pilates! She enjoyed starting her sessions with my pull-ups.

## DOs and DON'Ts

Here's what to focus on—and what to avoid—for a successful pull-up.

### DO

- Fuel the whole thing with breath. Exhale, while pulling up—inhalation while lowering.
- Ground your feet on the pedal, contract your deep abs and glutes, keep your shoulder girdle down, open your chest and think *strong*.
- Move slowly with precise, deep muscular control.
- Work on your grip: Really wrap your palms firmly around the bar and keep your weight centered on each hand. This helps you figure out how to target your deep back muscles and chest.
- Wear protective gloves and athletic shoes for better grip and protection, if desired.

### DON'T

- Don't be tempted to focus only on your upper body. Activate your lower body, glutes and abs so you can power your entire body upward.
- Don't use the Chair springs if you don't need them. In order to get stronger, let them assist, not do the work for you.

# The Barnett Pull-Ups Program

Start by using all the springs on the Wunda Chair. You may choose to gradually decrease the resistance as you get stronger. As always, make sure to incorporate the Pilates principles, such as alignment, breathing, centering and concentration. Do 3–5 reps of each of the following pull-ups. Choose a variation or two per workout session; change legs between sets.

## GEAR GUIDE

Larkin's own  
**Wunda Chair** by  
**Balanced Body**  
([pilates.com](http://pilates.com)); pull-  
up bar by **Stud Bar**  
([studbar.com](http://studbar.com)).

## FACING THE CHAIR

**START** Place the balls of your feet and your toes on the pedal with your feet in Pilates stance (heels together, toes apart) and your legs "bolted" together. Hold onto the pull-up bar, using an overhand grip, with your hands wider than shoulder-width apart. Inhale to prepare.

**MOVE** Exhale as you slowly pull your body up and gradually allow the pedal to lift. Inhale as you slowly lower your body and the pedal.



## SINGLE-LEG VARIATIONS

Repeat Facing the Chair with one leg:



Externally rotated, knee bent behind you.

Externally rotated, knee bent to the side.

Externally rotated, knee bent in front of your body.

Externally rotated and extending behind you.

Externally rotated and extending to the side.



Externally rotated and extending in front of you.

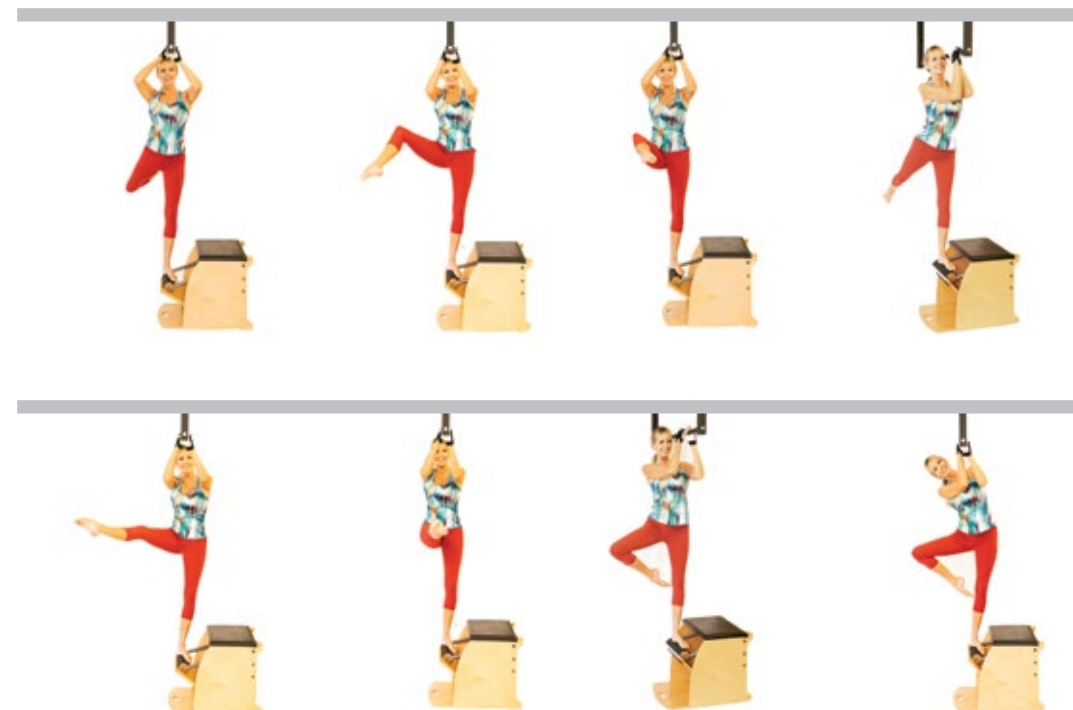
Bent to the side with your toes placed against the side of your opposite knee.

Externally rotated, knee bent behind you, as you simultaneously move into spinal extension.

Externally rotated, knee bent in front of you, as you simultaneously move into spinal flexion.

## FACING SIDeways TO THE CHAIR

Practice all the single-leg variations while facing sideways to the Chair with your inner foot on the pedal.

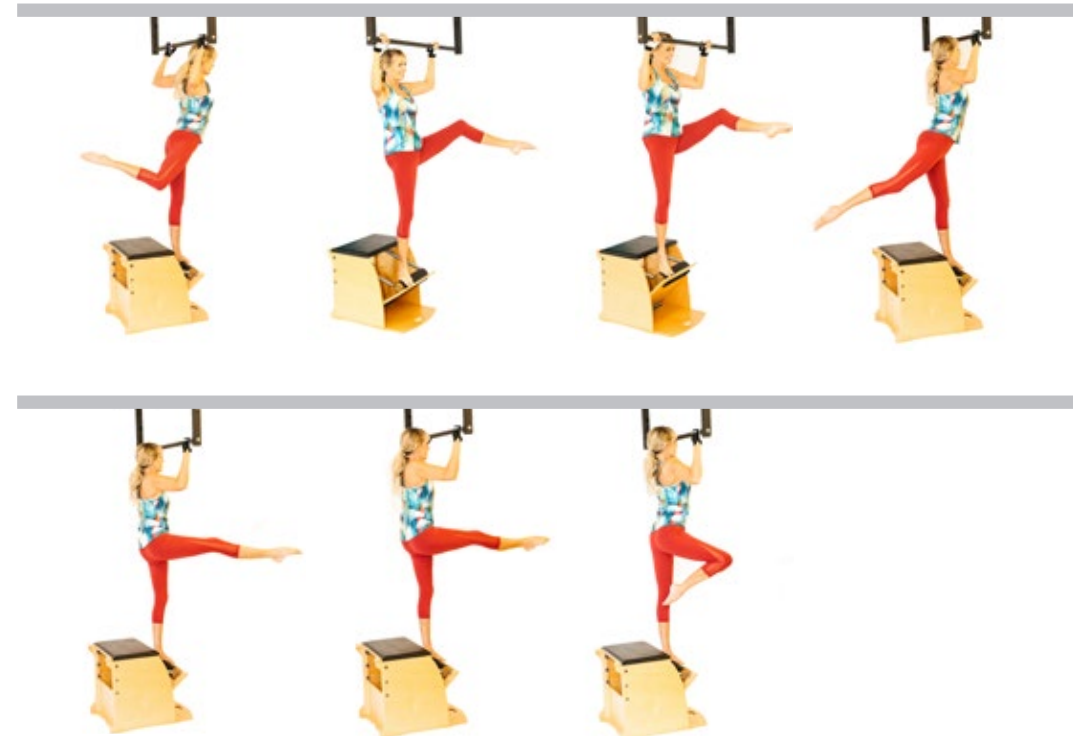


**VARIATION** Place your outer foot/toes on your opposite knee.

**VARIATION** Side-bend with your outer foot/toes on your opposite knee.

## FACING AWAY FROM THE CHAIR

Practice all of the single-leg variations while facing away from the Chair.



## WANT MORE?

For an additional program, practice chin-ups for the front-facing variations. Use an underhand grip to recruit more biceps, etc. Also, place a ball behind the knee of your bent gesture leg for those variations.

» Larkin Barnett, BA, MA, has been performing and teaching dance, fitness and Pilates for more than four decades, including at several universities and Canyon Ranch Spa. The Pilates Method Alliance granted 60 PMA CECs for instructors to learn Larkin's AthleticKinetics™ System, of which her Barnett Pull-Ups™ Program is part of and may not be shown via any media format. Larkin is the author of six award-winning books, including Practical Centering, Practical Pilates Using Imagery, Pilates and Calisthenics for Children, Creative Yoga for Children and On a Lark: Creative Movement for Children, as well as a Pilates DVD with the companion manual, Athletickinetics: Pilates and Performing Arts Aesthetic, available at [pilates.com](http://pilates.com). She has trained everyone from FBI agents to Olympic athletes to celebrities. For more information, visit [larkinbarnett.com](http://larkinbarnett.com), connect with Larkin on Facebook (@larkinbarnettpilates).