



YOGA FOR PREGNANCY – SIMPLY THE BEST

Written by Dana M Layon

Times have changed when it comes to exercise guidelines during pregnancy. In the past, moms-to-be were told to rest up for the nine (ten) months of pregnancy. Thankfully, those days are over and today's modern mom-to-be can look forward to less weight gain, less stress and more energy as a result of exercise.

Yoga Benefits

For pregnant women, the benefits of practicing yoga are endless. Yoga increases strength and flexibility; promotes balance and coordination and develops deep breathing patterns which helps in relaxation. The breathing technique -- known as *ujayi* -- requires you to take in air slowly through your nose, filling your lungs entirely, and exhaling completely until your stomach compresses.

Learning how to do *ujayi* breathing primes you for labor and childbirth by training you to stay calm when you need it most. When you're afraid -- during labor, for example -- the body produces adrenalin and shuts down the production of oxytocin, a hormone that makes labor progress. Yoga training will help you fight the urge to tense up when you feel the pain, and show you how to breathe instead.

Yoga Precautions During Pregnancy

Exercise during pregnancy is highly encouraged, but it's important to use caution and common sense when doing so. It is advisable to obtain physician consent prior to beginning any yoga class. Additionally, it is imperative to inform the instructor about any complications such as high blood pressure, a breech baby, chest pain, leg cramps or continual fatigue.

If you've never done an inversion, (ie, an upside down pose such as a head stand, shoulder stand or down dog), this is not the time to attempt one. Ask yourself, I know I can do this but should I? Although many women who are used to these poses can continue to do them well into their second trimesters, it's not always safe.

Avoid positions that stretch the abdominal muscles too much, such as deep forward or back bending and deep twists. You're more apt to tear and strain muscles now because pregnancy hormones, which allow the uterus to expand, also act on all connective tissue.

First Trimester

There aren't many restrictions this early in pregnancy. Just remember to follow general safety guidelines such as drinking lots of water, breathing deeply and regularly and accepting that your regular routine will require modifications as time goes on. Listen to your body and trust what it tells you.

Second Trimester

By now, morning sickness may have subsided. Hopefully you feel more energetic. Take advantage but be mindful to not overdue it. Listen to your body at all times. Make sure you are working with a yoga instructor, specially trained in prenatal yoga. Your balance and coordination may be off a bit so be aware of that. Also, as the ligaments and joints begin to loosen up, hold poses for strength and release when it's too much. Some women may start to feel uncomfortable on their backs now; some may not. Notice how you're feeling and if it feels okay to lie on your back, do it and elevate your feet while you're at it.

Third Trimester

You're probably feeling less graceful now that your belly is bigger. Perform standing poses close to a chair for support to avoid losing your balance and risking injury to you or your baby. Props such as blocks and straps can also help you move through different poses with greater stability.



Best Poses For Pregnancy

(Go to www.satsangyoga.net to view poses)

More important than just poses, I recommend attending a specialized yoga class for prenatal women. After continued attendance, it may be alright to do most poses during a home practice. Remember though that attending a regular prenatal class creates bonds and friendships that have the potential to last a lifetime.



Cat/Cow: This position helps relieve back pain, a common problem during pregnancy. Get down on your hands and knees, arms shoulder width apart and knees hip width apart. Inhale and lift your heart, stretch back through your tail and concave your spine. Exhale and roll your spine, lowering the head, pressing through the hands. Repeat following your breath.

Childs Pose: From any kneeling position, sit your tail back toward your heels. Sit back as far as is comfortable and rest your head toward the mat. You can stack your fists and rest your forehead there or use a block. Otherwise, stretch your arms out long in front of you and lower your forehead all the way to the mat.

Modified Down Dog: Anchor a chair onto your mat or against the wall. Lean over and press your palms into the seat of the chair. Walk the feet back away from the chair, the belly will be parallel to the floor, as if the baby was lying in a hammock. Feel the stretch from your heels up your calves, through the hamstrings and then all along the spine. Your head should only be low enough that when you shake your head “no”, you should be able to feel your ears near your biceps.

Squats: You should squat every day to relax and open the pelvis and strengthen the quadriceps. As you start to feel heavier in pregnancy, use props such as blocks or a pile of books to rest your bottom on. Focus on relaxing and letting your breath drop deeply into your belly. Stand facing the back of a chair with your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart, toes pointed outward. Squat toward the floor as though you were going to sit down in a chair. Contract your abdominal muscles, lift your chest, and relax your shoulders. Most of your weight should be toward your heels. You can also do this against the wall for support.

Other good poses during pregnancy are the standing postures Warrior II, Side Angle Bend, Triangle Pose, Reverse Warrior, Tree pose and Modified Dancers Pose. These poses help strengthen your joints and improve your balance. Warrior poses can also ease backache and sciatica.

Dana Layon is the President of Satsang Yoga Studio. She is a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) with the Yoga Alliance, member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), Co-founder of Natural Approach to Parenting (NAP) and Creator of the Prenatal Yoga Program at SW Washington Medical Center. She has two young children under the age of 4 and has devoted her time and energy into living a more balanced, healthy life. For more contact information, check out www.satsangyoga.net.