

## Benefits of Yoga During Pregnancy

- **Increases overall strength, flexibility & well-being** — When you practice yoga, you are not only stretching your muscles, but you are stretching the tissues that encase your muscles, stimulating your organ systems, promoting the circulation of blood and oxygen, breathing more intentionally, and focusing your attention inward through imagery and meditation. The combined effect is one that promotes a heightened state of physical and emotional well-being.
- **Reduces low back pain & sciatica** — As you are taught to become acutely aware of proper body alignment, you can carry yourself and your belly in an integrated manner. This can help to reduce the degree of pelvic tilt associated with pregnancy and significantly reduce the lower back pain which it can cause. Additionally, there are specific yoga poses which stretch the muscles and tissues associated with the lower back, hips, and hamstrings.
- **Reduces aches & fatigue in the thoracic & cervical regions of the spine** — During pregnancy, it can be difficult to find a space for yourself when trying to sleep at night. As a result, spinal alignment can become compromised during the night. This can leave congestion and muscle tension in the middle and upper regions of spine. There are yoga poses which create more fluidity in the spine by stretching the Para spinal muscles, as well as a poses which involve very gentle rotation of the upper torso. When these sequences are combined with directed yoga breathing, it can have the effect of relieving stress and creating more breathing room in these regions of the spine.
- **Reduces swelling & inflammation around your joints** — A regular and consistent asana practice improves and promotes the circulation of blood and oxygen throughout your body. This in turn, can reduce swelling and inflammation around ankles and wrists.
- **Aids in digestion** — As baby grows, your intestinal organs get pushed around which may affect your regularity and cause indigestion. A regular practice of safe and gentle rotations and forward folds can help to promote regularity and aid in overall digestive flow.
- **Helps prepare you physically for giving birth** — A regular practice of squatting asana helps to tone muscles of your pelvic floor and to help you gain strength to remain comfortable in a squatting position. You will want to be able to use these muscles efficiently and effectively when nature calls upon you to push your baby into the world.
- **Improves your emotional well-being** — Participating in a prenatal class provides a community of support from people who understand what you are experiencing. It is a place to make new friends with whom you feel similarly situated. The combination of the physical or asana portion of yoga with the emotional and spiritual component can be an aid in reducing pregnancy-related anxiety and helping to experience the miracle and empowerment of pregnancy.

## Benefits of Yoga during Labor

- **Soothe & empower yourself by finding your own inner rhythm** — You can learn to breathe in a way that is relaxing and natural, rather than contrived or awkward. When you consistently practice moving your body in a rhythmic fashion in unison with your breath, you carry with you a powerful relaxation and pain management tool.
- **Facilitate the labor process** — Through yoga, you can learn how to identify when you are holding tension in your body. A body that is tense is not going to facilitate the birth process as easily as one that is relaxed. Moreover, when the body is tense, you may experience tension in thought and a withholding of breath. Sometimes our first cue about how we are responding to something is by examining what our body is doing. Once we can identify the tension, we can soften the body, relax our thoughts and release the breath, which can provide for an easier labor.
- **Improve your physical comfort** — As you move through the various stages of labor, your body will want to move into different positions. If you are hoping for a natural birth, it can be helpful to have an idea of how you can position your body to help you during contractions and during times of relaxation. Many yoga poses can translate wonderfully into comfortable laboring positions.
- **Learn to use the tools of meditation & visual imagery** — These are inspiring mechanisms through which you can soften and open physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When it comes time to ride through the most powerful of contractions, visual imagery combined with breath work can be one of the most useful labor tools.
- **Become familiar with the concept of vocalization** — Labor is no time to be shy. It is the rare woman who births naturally and does not make a lot of noise in the process. In fact, I recall my husband telling me after the birth of our daughter that I had reached pitches and octaves he previously thought humanly impossible. In hindsight, I can tell you that the sounds that I made were a basic and primal part of the process and that they were made without my even thinking about it. If your yoga class includes chanting, you have an opportunity to become comfortable with the inherent power of vocalization. After all, “Om” is the birth sound!
- **Use the muscles of your pelvic floor effectively** — The weeks of squatting were not done in vain! Squatting combined with a kegel like movement during pregnancy really can help your labor in two ways. The work that you have been doing during your pregnancy has toned the muscles of your pelvic floor and given you practice tightening and releasing them. If you receive an epidural you may lose sensation in your pelvic floor which can make pushing your baby out a bit of a guessing game. If you are used to working with these muscles, you will find it easier to use them even if you can not feel them. Alternatively, if you are opting for a natural birth, you will want these muscles to work quickly and effectively when it comes time to push.

(excerpt from “The Expectant Mother’s Guide” by Gail Silver)

## Benefits of Post-Natal Yoga

- **Regain strength and fitness** — Yoga classes geared specifically towards new moms focus on improving overall health and wellness, while also addressing fitness issues resulting from pregnancy and motherhood, such as strengthening of the core and pelvic floor weakened during pregnancy, and stretching and opening the chest and shoulders which are hunched and stressed by carrying and feeding a new baby.
- **Replenish your energy** — After the whirlwind of pregnancy and delivery, moms immediately shift their attention and energy into caring for a new baby, often leaving little time to care for themselves. Post-natal yoga classes provide new moms with valuable relaxation and restoration techniques that can help them combat exhaustion and maintain the strength to keep up with their newborn's needs.
- **Balance your emotions and decrease stress** — The transition to motherhood is a time of intense emotional changes and can be scary and overwhelming. Yoga provides a natural and effective means of centering and connecting to both yourself and your child.
- **Bond with your baby!** — Mother and child yoga classes provide a wonderful way to strengthen the connection between mother and newborn, while improving the health and wellness of both. Many mother and child yoga poses emphasize eye contact and healing touch, as well as gentle stretches that help a baby stay flexible as their muscles develop. Deep breathing exercises done with a baby are soothing to both mother and child, and yoga is a meaningful activity that can grow with the needs of both.