

Yoga for Pregnancy: Developing a Safe Practice

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There is much contradictory information about what kind of fitness practice, exercise or yoga is safe and healthy during pregnancy. To explore this further, let's look at what happens during the three trimesters.

In the first trimester, the placenta is firmly established. Many women experience morning sickness and fatigue and are not comfortable continuing or beginning a yoga practice.

During the second trimester the baby's organs are developing and at 15 weeks the unborn baby can hear. Mom is gaining weight and her blood volume increases.

By the third trimester, the baby gains weight and the nervous system develops. The hormone relaxin is released so mom is more flexible and therefore more physically unstable. Additional weight adds strain and stress on her joints. The uterus increases to 500 times its normal size!

Prenatal yoga is an excellent way of increasing awareness and adapting to these physiological and emotional changes. Poses that are safe and comfortable for pregnant women and baby promote optimal health and prepare for birth. Yoga can tone muscles, increase circulation and reduce aches and pains. Breathing techniques reduce stress and will be helpful during childbirth. During prenatal yoga, the relationship with the baby deepens spiritually, mentally and physically. A prenatal yoga class is also an opportunity to meet other moms-to-be.

During the first few months of pregnancy, most yoga poses are safe, but it is probably best to avoid any that risk falling. Use a wall or chair for support for balancing poses such as tree or dancer. During the second and third trimester, steer clear of poses that strain the lower back (such as bridge), that strain the abdominal muscles (such as boat), forward bends that can "crush the passenger", and inversions including downward dog. Avoid poses that require lying on the back or stomach. And do not exercise in a room that is hotter than 100 degrees.

So what poses are recommended for a safe and healthy pregnancy? Standing poses (warriors, triangle, lunges) increase stamina, improve circulation and support the heart. Seated hip openers (cobbler, pigeon) relieve tightness in the pelvis, tone the pelvic floor and may relieve sciatica. Cat/cow stretches the back and may reposition the baby into a more comfortable position for both mom and baby. Restorative poses offer relaxation, rejuvenation and time to connect with the baby.

Breath work practice for birthing is essential for relaxation, comfort and confidence. Breath awareness reduces pain and increases the joy of giving birth.

Here are some additional recommendations for choosing and modifying any fitness practice.

- Lower the level of intensity
- Avoid getting hot
- Drink water while exercising and eat something
- Takes breaks
- Avoid abrupt movements.
- Most women can begin or continue to exercise during pregnancy. • Most doctors recommend regular exercise at least 3 times a week for at least 20 minutes during pregnancy.

Mimi Solaire (500 ryt) teaches prenatal yoga and has produced the DVD's- *Prenatal Yoga with Mimi Solaire, Back in Shape and Deep Stretch/Yin Yoga*. Join her at the Flagstaff Yoga Festival. www.mimisolaire.com