

Yoga

*for the
Journey
of*



Pregnancy

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The Journey of Pregnancy

Introduction

Pregnancy is a period of three semesters each about three months long. The three trimesters help measure the fetus's milestones in the womb. It also helps to differentiate the magnitude of care and therapy required by the mother each month.

The first trimester starts from the conception to the thirteenth week, or the first 3 months. The mother begins to experience physical and hormonal changes within the first few weeks. The first trimester is crucial for the developing fetus and the mother, as the chances of miscarriage are high in this period.

The second trimester begins from the thirteenth week of pregnancy till the twenty-seventh week. Pregnant mothers feel a lot more active during this period. The abdomen grows significantly in the trimester. By the end of the trimester, the mothers feel the baby's movements.



The third trimester begins at the twenty-eighth month till the delivery date. The fetus is growing every week and will soon be ready to come out. Mothers can feel their growing fetus kick and roll more within the belly. Braxton-Hicks contractions feel stronger. The third

trimester towards the end can be uncomfortable for mothers, especially those carrying twins or triplets.

Yoga during Pregnancy

As a women transition through these semesters, there are specific poses that are beneficial for her, some of these poses help with discomforts in the body, and others help to strengthen the body in preparation for labor and childbirth.

There are many different styles of yoga — some more strenuous than others. Prenatal yoga, hatha yoga and restorative yoga are the best choices for pregnant women. Talk to the instructor about your pregnancy before starting any other yoga class. Be careful to avoid hot yoga, which involves doing vigorous poses in a room heated to higher temperatures.

The most recommended style of Yoga to be practiced during the period of pregnancy is called “Prenatal Yoga”. The most important aspect to prenatal yoga is one that is practiced in all yoga, which is Ahimsa or non-violence to yourself or others. This means allowing the body to only do poses that feel good. This is more important in prenatal yoga because as the baby grows he changes positions often and there are times a certain pose may not be conducive to the position of the baby. Forcing positions because you have always in the past been able to do them or because you were able to do them easily on the other side is inappropriate for pregnant women and can cause strain.

We will cover Prenatal Yoga asanas in this book.

Pregnancy Anatomy

When a woman is pregnant her body changes every day. The physical changes begin occurring almost immediately with the release of hormones. These hormones are likely responsible for the mild to extreme fatigue and nausea as well as breast tenderness and swelling.

Hormones

HCG (Human Chorionic Gonadotropin) is produced by the embryo and later the placenta and helps maintain the ovary's ability to release progesterone.

Estrogen promotes the growth of the uterus, stimulates duct system and blood supply in the breasts and influences water retention, skin pigmentation and subcutaneous fat buildup.

Progesterone has a number of roles in the pregnant body. It relaxes the uterus and inhibits contractions therefore its levels change throughout pregnancy. It relaxes the walls of blood vessels to help maintain low blood pressure and relaxes the walls of the bowels and stomach to help with nutrient absorption. Progesterone also stimulates the production of the hormone Relaxin.

Relaxin lubricates the joints and softens connective tissue allowing the pelvis to open up to accommodate the baby. However, this hormone is not specific to the pelvis; it affects every other joint as well and can create instability in the joints, this is why you hear many pregnant women complaining of carpal tunnel syndrome. Therefore, you need to make sure your students take care not to overstretch.

The Uterus

The Uterus starts out about the size of a fist and is tilted slightly forward in most women above the bladder and in front of the

rectum and bowel. The entrance of the uterus is called the cervix. The uterus is made up of 3 layers:

Inner layer called the endometrium is a mucus lining which makes up the very inner wall where the placenta attaches. This layer is what is shed during menstruation.

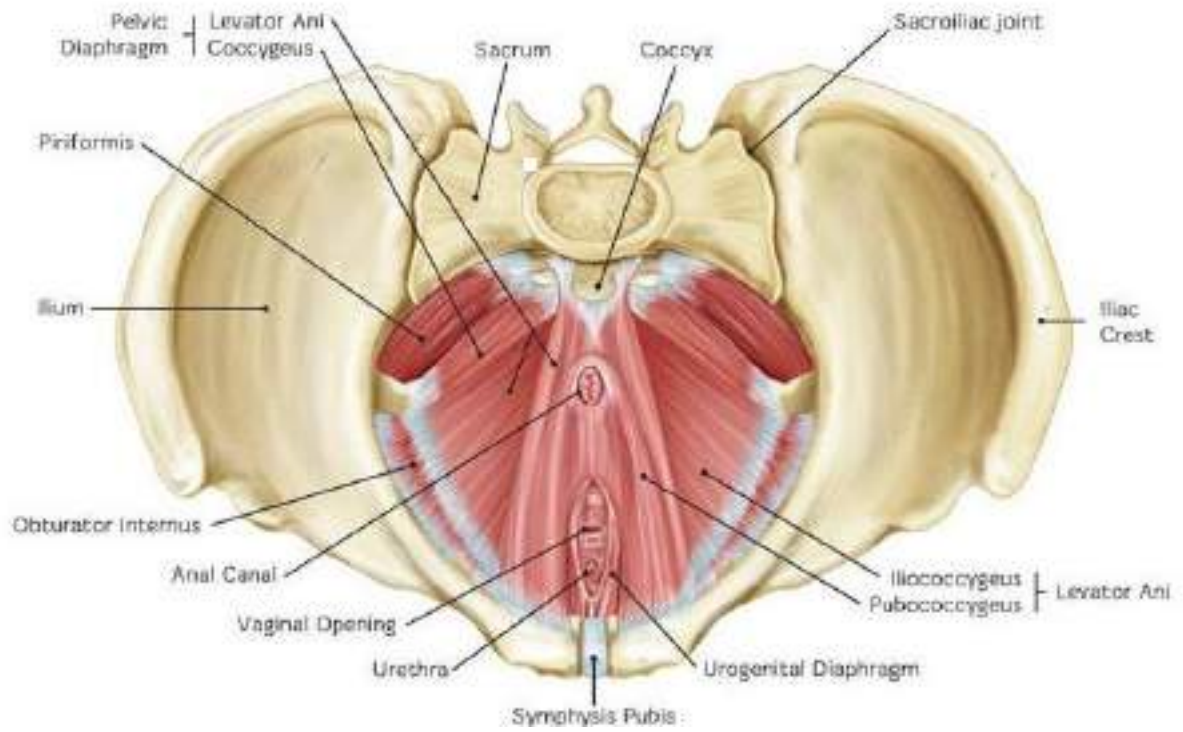
Middle layer called the myometrium, a combination of crisscross and lengthwise muscles that grow to 10x in length and 3x in width during pregnancy. The fundus is the group of muscles included in the myometrium that runs from the cervix to the top of the uterus and is measured to help determine gestational age. These muscles contract and shorten during labor making the cervix shorter and helping the baby move down.

Outer layer is called the perimetrium, it is loose tissue that surrounds the uterus and separates it from the intestines.

The Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor muscles are a hammock of muscles connected to the pubic bone and backbone that hold up the uterus, bladder and intestines. These muscles help control urination and bowel movements and help guide the baby through the birth canal during the pushing phase of childbirth. Because of the amount of weight the pelvic floor has to accommodate during pregnancy and the stretching these muscles do, they can easily become weak, thus causing urinary or anal incontinence. Pelvic floor exercises are a pivotal part of prenatal health.

SUPERIOR VIEW



Precautions

As you are going through the most complex, life changing process while you are pregnant, it is important to take precautions while performing any type of exercise. Listen to your body and do only poses that feel good and not try any new advanced poses for the first time while you are pregnant.

Exercing during Pregnancy

Everyone agrees that staying active and exercising while pregnant is the best way to maintain a woman's health and fitness and prepare her for the often strenuous and challenging rigors of childbirth. However, it can be difficult to perform asanas during the first trimester. In the first three months, women often experience extreme fatigue and varying degrees of nausea or "morning sickness" (which is absolutely not confined to mornings). Experts will agree that women should listen to their bodies and rest during this transitional period.

Once the first trimester is over, start slowly to get back to a routine. Start with 15 minutes once or twice a day and see how that feels for a few days. Because your body has been changing over the last few months and is changing every day, the things that felt great before you were pregnant might not feel good at all now. A simple twist or side stretch might feel uncomfortable. So, keep experiencing your body and slowly extend your yoga practice.

Consult your Doctor

Every woman is different and is ready to start exercising when her body tells her it is time as long as she has no complications with her pregnancy and has gotten the OK from her doctor or midwife. You might not be able to do prenatal yoga if you are at increased risk of preterm labor or have certain medical conditions, such as heart disease or back problems. So do consult your health care provider before starting your practice.

Listen to your Body

We have gotten so accustomed to “asking the experts” and getting the latest research (which almost always contradicts the previous research) that we have lost the connection with our own bodies.

Pregnancy is a great time for a woman to reconnect with her body, to get in touch with what feels good for her and what doesn't, whether it be food, exercise or any activity that she participates in, doing it mindfully and paying attention. Your body has a lot to say!

First Semester Precautions

1. Do not overstretch, relaxin in the body can cause instability in the joints and connective tissue.
2. Pregnant women should be able to maintain normal ujjayi breathing without getting out of breath as they practice.
3. ANY pose that causes discomfort should be avoided (even simple ones).
4. Move into every pose slowly and mindfully.
5. Although most yoga practices encourage not eating 2 hours before practicing, pregnant women should have a light snack (apple or fruit, nothing hard to digest) an hour before yoga and should stop and drink water if they are thirsty.
6. Any pranayama with rapid breathing or breath retention e.g. kabalabhati should be avoided.
7. Asanas that target the repetitive overuse of the rectus abdominus muscles should be avoided.
8. Forward bending, standing or seated with legs together should not be practiced.

9. Stomach lying poses will stop feeling good at some point early in pregnancy and should be avoided when that happens.

Second Semester Precautions

1. Same as first semester precautions.
2. If you have been inactive in your first semester (commonly due to fatigue and sickness), start up your practice slowly. Rest in Child's pose frequently.
3. After 4 months you should avoid lying on your back for more than 30 seconds due to constriction of the vena cava (large blood vessel that runs from the legs to the heart.) If the vena cava is compressed by the weight of the baby it can cut off oxygen to the woman and the baby.
4. Poses like Upward Dog, Wheel, Headstand should be discontinued.
5. Unsupported backbends, Intense twists, stomach lying poses, back lying poses should be avoided.

Third Semester Precautions

1. Same as first and second semester precautions.
2. Discontinue downward dog or forward bends, if it stops feeling good.
3. Rest in child's pose more frequently and take long breaks between doing yoga.

Prenatal Yoga Asanas

We will now go through the standard prenatal yoga asanas. Keep in mind that every pregnant body is different and these modifications are simply guidelines, a pregnant woman needs to listen to her body first and foremost.

Seated hand on heart

Start your practice with this pose to bring awareness towards your body. This pose will allow you to enter into quiet mindfulness and will help you move with awareness of your body and your baby in the moment.

- Sit upright in a comfortable seated posture.
- Place your right hand on heart and left hand on the belly.
- Take a couple of deep breaths.
- Check in with your body. Feel the differences in your body.



Variations in the seated posture





Cat/Cow Pose (Marjaryasana)

This is a wonderful posture during pregnancy to tone the abdominal muscles in a safe position, release the lower back, and guide the baby in a safe position during delivery.

- Kneel on the floor and put your hands on the floor in front of you.
- Keep your hands shoulder-width apart, directly under the shoulders and your knees directly below your hips.
- Inhale deeply while curving your lower back and bringing your head up, tilting your pelvis up like a "cow."
- Exhale deeply and bring your abdomen in, arching your spine and bringing your head and pelvis down like a "cat."



Being in the kneeling position, extend the opposite arm and leg, if it feels comfortable for you. This will help stabilize the pelvis and is a safe way to tone the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles.



If having the opposite leg and arm off the ground is too much for you, try the variations below.



Child's Pose (Balasana)

- Sit down on your heels keeping knees wide apart and big toes together.
- Stretch your arms out in front with forehead on the mat.
- This is a resting pose, so stay in the pose anywhere between 30 seconds to few minutes.



- If you are in the third trimester a pillow can be placed under the head or/and hip.



Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Swanasana)

This pose is great for fatigue.

- Come onto your hands and knees and bring your hands slightly in front of your shoulders. Spread your fingers wide, press down through your knuckles, and tuck your toes under.
- Exhale as you lift your knees off the mat and reach your sit bones toward the ceiling while lengthening your back.
- Stay in the pose for 30 seconds to few minutes.
- Relax in Child Pose.

This pose shouldn't be practiced if:

- It doesn't feel good or if you are experiencing heartburn.
- You have high blood pressure or eye conditions such as Glaucoma.
- You are in the third semester and baby has been recently turned.



Warrior I (Virabhadrasana I)

- From Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), step your right foot forward so your toes are in line with your fingertips, and shift your foot slightly to the right.
- Bend your front knee 90 degrees. Your thigh should be approximately parallel to the floor, your knee stacked over your ankle, and your right outer hip pinned back.
- Pivot your left heel to the floor so your foot forms a 45-degree angle to the side of the mat. Align your left heel with your right heel. Widen your stance as you progress into your third semester.

- Press your left thighbone back so your left knee is straight.
- As you inhale, raise your torso and reach up with the arms, hands shoulder-distance apart and palms facing each other. Allow your shoulder blades to open out and up, away from your spine and toward your outer armpits. Rotate your biceps back, and firm your triceps into your midline.
- Keep pressing your left femur back while releasing your tailbone toward the floor. Draw your lower belly back and up away from your right thigh.
- Hold for 5–10 breaths or till you feel comfortable.
- Release your hands to the floor, step back to Downward-Facing Dog, and repeat on the other side.



Warrior II (Virabhadrasana II)

1. Face the long side of your mat with your arms stretched straight out from your shoulders and your feet parallel to each other in a wide stance. You want your ankles approximately beneath your wrists.
2. Turn your right foot and knee to face the front of the mat.
3. Angle your left toes slightly in toward the upper left corner of the mat.
4. Bend your right knee and stack it over your right ankle.

5. Distribute your weight evenly between both legs. Press down through the outer edge of your back foot.
6. Keep the crown of your head stacked over your pelvis and your shoulders over your hips.
7. Reach strongly through both arms toward the front and back of the mat and turn your head to look past your right fingertips.
8. Stay here for 5–10 breaths or till you feel comfortable.
9. To come out of the pose, exhale as you press down through your feet, then inhale and straighten your legs. Return your feet to parallel facing the left long side of the mat.
10. Repeat on the other side.



Triangle (Trikonasana)

The Triangle is one of the poses that typically feel very good in pregnancy because it helps relieve backache, which is a common discomfort in pregnancy. It also aides in digestion, is a great stress reliever and strengthens the spine, calves, hamstrings, hips, chest, and groin.

- Stand and step your feet 3 to 4 feet apart.
- Inhale, raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively to the sides, shoulder blades wide, palms down.

- Turn your left foot in slightly and your right foot forward to face the front of the mat. Align your right heel with your left heel if that's comfortable for you. Engage your quads.
- Exhale and extend your torso forward—bending from your hip joint, not the waist—to reach your side body directly over your front leg. Counter the reach by anchoring your left hip to the left. Ground this movement by strengthening the left leg and pressing the outer heel firmly to the floor.
- When you have reached as far as you are able, hinge at the hip and bring the torso to the right, moving toward your upper body being parallel to the floor. Reach your right hand down toward the floor and stretch your left arm toward the ceiling, in line with the tops of your shoulders. Your hands, arms and shoulders will form a straight line, perpendicular to your mat.
- Open your torso to the left, keeping the left and right sides of the torso equally long. Let the left hip come slightly forward and lengthen the tailbone toward the back heel.
- Rest your right hand on your shin, ankle, or the floor outside your right foot—whatever is possible without distorting the sides of the torso. Keep your head in a neutral position or turn to look up at your hand or down at the ground.
- Stay in this pose for 30 to 60 seconds. Inhale to come up, strongly pressing the back heel into the floor and reaching the top arm toward the ceiling. Recenter, then reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time on the other side.

You can try out these variations as per your comfort.





Plank pose (Palakasana)

- Begin in Tabletop. Bend your arms and rest on elbows.
- Place the elbows under the shoulders and knees exactly below your hips.
- The main concern with plank and pregnancy is the weight of the belly putting too much stress on the spine, so it is a good idea to keep the knees down in plank.
- Stay in the position for 30 seconds to few minutes or till you feel comfortable.



Half moon pose (Ardha Chandrasan)

This pose is one where props can be very helpful. In the first trimester and even second trimester for those with a strong practice, a wall and block are not necessary but might feel really good. This pose is wonderful for most women in the last few weeks of pregnancy. It rests one side of the uterus at a time giving the ligaments a rest. Most women love this pose near the end of their pregnancies.

- Place a block parallel to the wall (6 inches (12-15 cm) away).
- Place the right foot 6 inches (12-15cm) in back of the block also 6 inches (12-15cm) from the wall and parallel to it.
- Place the right hand on the block as you bend the right knee.
- As you straighten the right leg lift the left leg up so it is parallel to the ground and against the wall. Flex the left foot.
- Begin to roll against the wall so both shoulders and both hips are touching the wall.
- Reach up with the left arm and feel the chest opening.
- Exhale, lower your arm and leg, come back to standing and then repeat with the other leg.



Pigeon Pose (Ek Pada Rajakapotasana)

This is one of the best poses for pregnant women to do. It helps with sciatica (a major complaint in pregnant women), opens the hips, releases tension in the lower back and stretches the groin and psoas muscles. A pillow can be placed under the hip of the forward leg if needed to ensure the hips are squared to the floor.

- From a tabletop position, square your body and align your hands beneath your shoulders and knees bent beneath the hips.
- On an inhale, bend your right knee and bring your leg forward until the knee is just behind your right wrist.
- Next, slide the right foot under the left side of your body.

- Slide your left leg straight backward with the left foot facing the ground. This back leg remains straight out on the floor behind you with the left thigh slightly engaged throughout the pose. Slide it backward until your right ankle is beneath your left hip.
- You will begin to feel the outer hip of your front leg externally rotating as the knee splays outward. Adjust the right foot as needed to find a comfortable position.
- Keep your hips square and level toward the front of the mat. Do not allow your hips to twist or rock to one side.
- Your right knee should be aligned under your right armpit and the right heel should be directly under your left hip.
- For a deeper stretch, begin gently folding your chest forward and placing your elbows on the floor.
- Stretch your arms forward with palms together or facing downward. Rest your forehead on the floor.
- Keep your weight evenly distributed, feeling a compression on inside of the right hip and a deep stretch throughout the outside of the hip abductor.
- Exhale and let gravity draw your upper body down over the bent knee.
- Switch sides and repeat the process with the left knee bent and left foot under the right hip.



Garland Pose or Squat (Malasana)

This is a great pose for pregnant woman to do as it opens the hips.

- Take a seat on the mat or the ground with your feet slightly wider than your hips.
- Bend your knees into a squat position as shown below.
- Next, bring your hands together and join your palms in the 'Namaskar' position.
- Gently press your elbows toward your inner thighs.
- Then, try to bring your hips closer to the ground. Sit on a bolster or block if you feel uncomfortable in this position.
- Maintain a straight spine throughout the pose. Make sure both feet are flat on the floor and the belly is comfortable between the thighs.



**This pose is contraindicated if you have been experiencing preterm labor.

** This pose is also counter indicated if a woman is in labor and the baby is high in the pelvis. If the baby is low enough this position helps the baby move down the birth canal because of the pressure the legs put on the belly.

*Caution- this pose can be quite intense if done during a contraction, it is best to do it in between contractions or during pushing.

Goddess Pose (Utkata Konasana)

Goddess pose is a nice leg strengthening pose, it can be used as well to help connect with the pelvic floor bringing attention to the pelvic floor while cuing the breath.

- Stand with your feet wider than shoulder-width apart. You'll want a good amount of distance between your feet, but you should be able to bend your knees comfortably.
- Turn your feet slightly outward, with your toes pointing toward the corners of your mat.
- Begin to squat down while bending your knees.
- Tuck your tailbone, press your belly button up and in, externally rotate your thighs, and straighten your spine while relaxing your shoulders.
- Keep your knees over your ankles and keep sinking. If you can make it there comfortably, try to get your thighs parallel to the floor.
- Your arms can bend at the elbows as in Eagle arms or rest wherever they're comfortable.



Happy Baby Pose (Ananda Balasana)

Ananda Balasana is a great stretch for the inner thighs, inner groins, hips, hamstrings—even the shoulders and chest are involved. It offers freedom in the back muscles, which is great after doing other poses, especially backbends and twists. When you take Happy Baby, the sacrum broadens. It gently stretches the inner groins and the back spine. It also calms the brain and helps relieve stress and fatigue.

- Lie on your back. With an exhale, bend your knees into your belly.
- Inhale, grip the outsides of your feet with your hands, or loop a strap or belt over each foot. Open your knees slightly wider than your torso, then bring them up toward your armpits.
- Position each ankle directly over the knee, so your shins are perpendicular to the floor. Flex your feet. Gently push your feet up into your hands (or the belts) as you pull your hands down to create a resistance.



This is a great hip opener. Make sure you are rocking side to side after the 5th month to avoid pressure on the vena cava. Late in pregnancy discontinue this pose if it stops feeling good.

Reclining Bound Angle Pose (Supta Baddha Konasana)

This pose can be used as a relaxation. It stretches and lengthens the upper back and shoulders. A great hip and groin opener.

- Sit in front of a bolster, bend the knees and bring the bottoms of the feet together.
- Gently recline back over the bolster and reach the arms over the head.
- Bring the feet to the floor with the heels close to the hips as much you can. Let the knees open wide apart.
- Stay in the position for 4-8 breaths or till you feel comfortable.



For the variations, you can rest the arms by your sides, palms facing up or rest the hands on the thighs to encourage the knees to drop towards the floor.

Conclusion

Congratulations! if you are on the journey of pregnancy.

The journey of pregnancy is an experience of a lifetime. Enjoy every moment of it. Pay careful attention to your changing body, heart and mind and to your growing baby.

In today's world, we are so accustomed to getting the experts view on everything that we lost connection with body. Pregnancy is a great time to reconnect with your body and decide on what feels good for you and what doesn't, be it food, exercise or any activity. Therefore, while practicing yoga, listen to your body for which pose to do or which not to do. Follow the guidelines and precautions mentioned in this book for every pose to safely practice it.

Keep yourself away from any stress and overly hard physical work. Practicing prenatal yoga as mentioned in this book will help you remain calm and aware of your body changes. Choose to be happy and joyful!!

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Thank You!
