

Prenatal Yoga Tips for the 1st Trimester

By Sheila Huggins-Rao



All women experience pregnancy differently but, just as an athlete trains for a major event, moms-to-be can benefit from a regular practice of yoga leading up to, and after birthing. Prenatal yoga, takes into consideration the unique needs of women through the various stages of pregnancy. A regular practice of breathing techniques, gentle yoga postures that strengthen and stretch, relaxation and meditation can make the journey into motherhood that much more enjoyable.

Whether you are in your first trimester or in your final weeks of pregnancy, yoga offers ways to relax, to relieve any light discomfort, and to prepare for birthing, bringing awareness to the extraordinary transformation happening within you. Asanas, the physical poses, can help build strength and stamina and improve circulation. Certain poses help to open the body to make room as the baby grows, and to prepare particular muscles for birthing. Meditation can improve the mind and body's ability to relax and to concentrate. Pranayama, breathing exercises, can also help to relax the body and mind, and develop skills to manage contractions during birth.

Yoga is appropriate for women in all stages of pregnancy, however there are unique factors to consider in each trimester. In this article we'll discuss the key factors to consider during the first trimester.

In the first few weeks of pregnancy, the body produces the hormones needed to build a stronger uterine wall to house a new life. The increase in blood volume reduces blood pressure, giving the internal organs time to adjust to this rapidly growing life. Some women experience nausea and fatigue. Others may be lucky enough to feel only slight tiredness.

If you are an avid yoga practitioner and you are luckily nausea-free, you may continue your regular practice. It's important to listen to your body and recognize any discomfort from overexertion. Although it is important to stay healthy and active, it is equally important to rest, letting your body restore its energy as it generously supports a growing new life.

Standing asanas such as Triangle (Trikonasana), Warrior I and II (Virabhadrasana I) and Forward Fold (Uttanasana) can be practiced with little or no modifications in the first trimester. These asanas may help to alleviate some digestive discomfort. If you have a regular yoga practice and routinely do inversions, such as Headstand (Sirsasana) or Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana) you can keep it up. However, because of the drop in blood pressure, slight dizziness or light headedness may occur. It might feel more comfortable to begin to limit inversions to downward dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana) and standing inversions in case nausea is still a concern. Basic twists and balances such as the Sage twist (Marciyasana) and Tree pose are also OK to practice in the first trimester as long as no other health concerns are present. Back bends such as Bridge (Setu Banhasana) can be practiced comfortably. Sarvasana, the relaxation pose, during the first trimester is important to practice to give your mind and body that much needed rest and deep relaxation. Becoming familiar with the benefits of Sarvasana early in the pregnancy allows your muscles to find that state of release, of the 'letting go' that is needed for an optimal birthing experience.

Most basic asanas and breathing exercises are recommended to practice during the first trimester, with an understanding that every woman experiences pregnancy differently and during those first weeks, it is a good time start practicing mindfulness of the pregnancy experience, honouring the body as a home to your new life. There are many modifications to regular asanas that begin to be more relevant during the second trimester, when there is added weight and your balance and gait begins adjusting accordingly.

Pranayama (breathing) exercises from the first trimester onwards help to relax and calm your mind and body as you adjust to being pregnant. Deep yogic breathing allows you to focus inward, to your growing baby and to your transforming body. Daily meditation throughout pregnancy has many benefits including calming the mind, focus on the mind-body connection and relaxing into each changing state of pregnancy. A regular meditation practice can give you and your baby the relaxed and open conditions you need to birth with ease.

A pregnancy yoga class may modify many asanas and maintain a more relaxed pace than a regular class. A prenatal yoga instructor will understand more specific changes going on and can help to develop a yoga practice that is unique to your own experience with pregnancy. Some types of yoga classes are going to feel more comfortable than

others. Hatha, Yin, Restorative yoga may be beneficial to those with nausea. Advanced Power yoga or Ashtanga yoga or hot yoga classes may heighten nausea and fatigue, depending on the level of yoga that was practiced prior to pregnancy.

Exercise and relaxation are essential to an enjoyable pregnancy and prenatal yoga offers both in a unique and beneficial way for you and your baby.

Sheila Huggins-Rao teaches prenatal yoga at Metta Massag & Yoga. Visit www.mettamassage.com/yoga-schedule for more information.

