

Relaxing Into Motherhood with Prenatal Yoga and Massage

THE ESSENCE OF GIVING BIRTH IS RELAXATION, A PROFOUND LETTING GO. Conscious relaxation through prenatal yoga, meditation, massage, and other means can, therefore, greatly contribute to a comfortable pregnancy and labor. Yoga and massage can help nurture a pregnant woman, attune to the changing body and to the developing baby, and ease the discomforts associated with pregnancy and giving birth. Being in the pregnant body – home for two – is a constant yoga practice, as it involves the union of body-mind-spirit and union of mother and baby, as well as continual adaptation to the pregnant body and the rapidly growing baby within. Taking time to connect with the body and one's feelings in the midst of day to day activity, in the midst of all of the changes, and in the midst of preparations for the new arrival can help the pregnant woman notice, experience, and enjoy the transitions and sensations that so quickly pass. These practices can also help the pregnant woman appreciate that birth is a holistic, instinctive, and natural body-mind process.

When pregnant, the demands on the back may be particularly noticeable. Yoga postures and flows, as well as massage, can help relieve back pain, maintain good posture, and reduce pressure on the spine. Stretching while strengthening helps the pregnant woman adapt to her ever-changing body, remain fit, free the hips and pelvic opening, and counterbalance the growing abdomen. Practices to tone the pelvic floor can help relax and strengthen the pelvic opening, prepare for a more controlled birthing, diminish complications, and enhance postnatal healing. Moving keeps the breath, blood, oxygen, hormones, and energy flowing. Through yoga, the woman practices with gentleness and does what feels right, listening to her body's intuitive pregnancy and birthing wisdom.

Breath work can help women relax and calm down. Learning to ride these rhythms helps the pregnant woman stay present with whatever is happening and steadies breath, body, mind, and emotions. This is also essential in preparing to coordinate breath with the rhythm of contractions in labor.



The hormonal changes involved in pregnancy can heighten emotions. Feelings may change rapidly and may be more deeply experienced. Yoga gives the ability to witness the waves of emotion and sensation that occur during pregnancy and labor. The waves can shift from more to less energy, greater to fewer discomforts. Each

woman's experience is as unique as the woman giving birth; yoga practices can be adapted to these changing needs. Allowing feelings to surface and being aware of them is beneficial to both mother and the developing baby. Yoga can help a mother develop her relationship with her baby through attentiveness to the major body and life transitions taking place.

It is natural to experience some fear of labor. Although messy and animalistic, labor and delivery are also profoundly spiritual, as one births and connects to a new life! Yoga helps prepare women to face childbirth with courage no matter how the birthing experience evolves. Yoga, massage, and relaxation can help a woman trust and follow her own instincts, access her inner resources, become aware of and resolve fears and anxieties, and understand how to create optimum conditions for birth to be as natural as possible. Remaining as confident, relaxed, flexible, and calm as possible during labor facilitates the birthing process and reduces fear, pain, tension, and fatigue. Yoga can help one face labor with acceptance and equanimity, and increase the joy of giving birth!

Women who have never practiced yoga before may be drawn to it in pregnancy due to the increased motivation toward being healthy, as well as to the natural turning inward that is involved in nurturing a new life and preparing for motherhood. Prenatal yoga practices can hasten one's recovery. Caring for oneself and developing greater self-awareness through yoga and massage can become a source of health both during and after pregnancy. Yoga, breath work, and meditation allow women to experience the power and transformation of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. ▲