

## **Prenatal Yoga Benefits All Moms**

By Kyla Saphir

As I lay in a supported position with the soles of my feet touching and my hands on my belly, I could feel my baby fluttering around in my growing belly. I wasn't in my own bed or at the OBs office. I was on my yoga mat giving myself time and space to connect with my body, my breath and most importantly, my baby. The weekly prenatal yoga classes that I was attending allowed me to come to class and prepare my mind and body for the journey of pregnancy, labor, and motherhood.

Prenatal yoga prepares your body and mind for labor as well as providing a community of women going through the same life changing experience with you. I found that the prenatal classes I took in Seattle for all 40 weeks of pregnancy were like group therapy sessions where women could share the highs and lows of their pregnancies as well as sharing resources like childbirth classes. I met some great moms who I still stay in touch with to this day. I believe all moms need a strong community of other moms to connect with and share stories during this incredible period.

Attending prenatal yoga normalized labor and childbirth for me by removing some fears and uncertainty. It gave me the confidence that my body was perfectly built to have a baby. The active part of yoga, poses called asanas, allowed me to stay fit and I think they aided in my quick labor in which I was able to incorporate poses with breath work. My prenatal yoga teacher taught me to identify and effectively deal with the intense sensations of each contraction by using my breath to let go. I learned of deep belly breathing and fluttering the lips, which was called *horse breath* which help open the pelvic outlet allowing baby to come out more quickly. I learned other techniques for labor, including counting breaths, which I used during active labor.

Yoga helped me develop strong muscles for childbirth. During labor, I got into *puppy pose* (which is like being on all fours but with your elbows down instead of your hands) and it was the ONLY position I used throughout labor. I stopped and used puppy pose as I walked to the car to go to the hospital, in the hospital lobby, while laboring in triage, and in the delivery room. I also used the squat bar at the hospital and it was lucky that I'd practiced squatting in yoga class because it can be a tiring pose if your body isn't ready.

Prenatal yoga can assist low risk pregnant mamas as well as high risk pregnancies. A recent study out of India has shown that yoga can decrease negative impacts of preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, and intrauterine growth restrictions by lowering moms blood pressure and stress levels\*. Moms who were considered high risk for these factors ended up having lower blood pressure and a lower maternal stress rate than moms who didn't practice yoga. Prenatal yoga is a natural way for moms who are high risk to continue to be healthy and active by reducing the stressors of diseases that can occur during pregnancy.

I continue to use yoga techniques to help me relax and take deep breaths, especially when dealing with my 3 year old! The reason I got certified to teach yoga with a specialty in prenatal yoga is that there are so few classes offered to moms in Columbia (only one studio I know of does any classes and they are only once a month). This is a stark contrast to Seattle, where I lived previously before moving to Columbia, which had classes every day of the week and at multiple locations around the city. There are so many women in Columbia having babies that I want to offer them this amazing chance to connect to their bodies, minds, and other women going through pregnancy.

\*"The Effects of Yoga in Prevention of Pregnancy Complications in High Risk Pregnancies: A Randomized Controlled Trial", conducted by the SVYASA University's Department of Life Sciences in Bengaluru, India.

### **3 Yoga Poses for Pregnancy, Labor, and Birth**

During pregnancy, it's important to stay in shape and prepare your body for labor and birthing your baby. However, doctors often limit the things women can do during pregnancy for safety reasons. Yoga is a great, gentle way to get your body balanced and ready for bringing your child into the world! There are three main poses that are taught during prenatal yoga that can aid you in having a quicker and more functional birth. In Columbia, there are not many prenatal yoga classes offered so these poses can be practiced at home during any trimester of pregnancy (see note about squatting for exceptions to this!). Movement during labor facilitates a quicker, less painful labor by relaxing the body and also helping the baby move into an optimal fetal position. Grab your yoga mat and let's begin!

#### **1) Poses on All 4's**

Come down onto your hands and knees. Hands and wrists are directly beneath your shoulders. Spread your fingers wide and engage your arms so you don't collapse into your shoulders. Knees are directly beneath your hips. If the knees are sensitive, place a blanket under them. Begin to move through cat/cow. Inale into cow where you will broaden through your collar bones, tilt your tailbone upward, and gently sway your belly down (without over arching your back). Exhale into cat, drawing your chin to chest, belly button draws up towards the spine, tuck your tailbone down, let your neck relax. Continue to move through this pose with your breath. This pose helps warm up the spine and relieves tension in the neck and back.



*Other poses on all fours can be body circles, hip sways, and puppy pose.*

#### **2) Wide Legged Forward Fold**

Walk your feet off your mat about 6-8 inches. Slightly turn your toes in. Gently bend forward and bring your hands down to the floor, blocks, or stacked books. Breathe into this fold as you relax your neck and upper back. This pose spreads your hip bones and helps balance your pelvis. It also opens the pelvic outlet and spreads the pelvic floor which will need elasticity in order to birth your baby. Another benefit is that it can relieve pressure on the lower back. This posture can also be done with your arms against the wall and a partner squeezing your hips or rolling massage balls up and down your spine.



#### **3) Squatting**

Squatting is a wonderful position to labor and birth your baby in as it opens the pelvic outlet 28% more than lying on your back. Many hospitals have squatting bars at the ends of the beds to use to help support you in this position (ask about this on your hospital tour!). This is a great pose to use but it can be challenging and tiring if you have not practiced it.

Before moving into a squat, warm up your calves, achilles, hips and ankles. Do this in anyway that feels good to you such as pressing your foot against the wall or a block to stretch your calf, ankle, and achilles. To move into the squat, walk your feet out slightly wider than your hips. Gently lean forward and bring your hands on blocks, books, or the floor if you can reach. Then slowly rock your hips side to side and move into the squatting position. If your heels come off the floor, place a rolled blanket underneath them for stability. Once you feel stable you can bring your elbows between your knees and hands to heart center. Try to keep your feet as parallel as possible as it opens the pelvic outlet more for baby to come out.



You can also do squats supported on blocks/books.

Another variation is doing squats with a partner.



Mom moves up and down in a squatting position while partner supports her by holding on to her elbows and arms.

**\*\*\*Avoid unsupported squatting if baby is breech, you have placenta previa, or hemorrhoids!\*\*\***

## How To Keep Your Sanity as a New Mom

By Kyla Saphir

My story into motherhood is not unique except for one key factor. My family moved 2 times before our infant turned 4 months old. And not just down the street. We moved from Seattle to Chicago and then Chicago to Columbia SC. So yes we moved across the country with an infant for my husbands work to a new city where we had no family nearby. Along this motherhood journey I found out a few things that helped me adjust to being a new mom in a new town as well as living in a place with no built in support structure.

I found out how important it is for me to have something just for me, which is teaching expecting and new moms yoga. Now it may sound selfish to do something only for you but it truly isn't. Infants need lots of care from you around the clock. And toddlers want all of your attention but you deserve some "me time" so this new role of mom doesn't drive you insane. This time to yourself is beneficial for everyone in your family so you can feel relaxed or grounded even for a little while. For moms that work outside of the home as well as full time moms, we all need to make time for ourselves. Here are a few ways to make this happen:

### 1) Treat Yo'Self (quote from Donna on *Parks and Rec*)

I know it can be hard to balance work, life, and family with the limited time the day affords. Giving yourself just 30 minutes a week to do something only for you can be helpful. Think of those long gone days before baby when you loved to do certain things for yourself-getting your nails or hair done, reading a book, exercising (postnatal yoga can help get you back into shape and help your mind relax as well), taking a bath, or continuing a creative hobby. Some moms even turn their creative passions into a part time job they can do from home.

Your well-being is important for yourself as well as your family. These minutes you enjoy to yourself should be done without guilt. You have to function on little sleep and have a little one (or many little ones) depending on you all day. You deserve a break! Now I know it's not easy or cheap if you don't have family living near by so that brings us to tip number 2.

### 2) Create and Use your support system

Whether you have relatives, close friends without kids, or a helpful spouse, reach out to them to help with your little one. If you need a break to do anything that's easier to do without a baby, use this team to support you! Even small errands, grocery shopping, or taking a shower can be so much more relaxing and quicker without having to worry about baby for a few minutes. Working mamas I know you can always use a few minutes alone to get necessary stuff done on nights and weekends.

If you don't have these people close and can afford having a babysitter, have them come even for a few hours a week while your home with baby. This can greatly improve your sanity. I was lucky enough to have this paid support since we don't have family or friends without kids near us and my husband works unpredictable hours. Getting a few hours a week to do my own thing really helped me feel like my old self as well as getting things done without having to worry about baby missing a nap. Plus my daughter got to interact with other adults and I got time to miss my little one and couldn't wait to be with her when I returned.

### 3) Make Mom Friends

This can be done in number of ways! It helps to connect with moms with babies that are around the same age as yours and who are going through the same stages at the same time. There may be a work colleague who is on maternity leave at the same time as you. Or maybe you have a neighbor due the same time. If you don't know anyone personally, you can go to a mom and baby class offered at places like MyGym or Little Gym or

do a mom and baby yoga classes. The library offers baby and toddler storytimes and is free! Having any outlet and access to an adult conversation and a playmate for your baby can feel like a huge reprieve. If you're from out of town like me, I found that other new transplants to the area made great friends since they were also looking to connect with moms and didn't have a built in support system.

When you're hanging with other new mamas, you can swap crazy stories that you'd never thought you'd talk about in a million years before baby. Like how many colors of poop can there really be or breastfeeding scenarios that sound like something out of a Sci-fi movie. Having mom friends to walk with, talk with, and commiserate on how hard parenting can be, can feel like free therapy.

These are just a few ways I've been able to retain my sanity with a busy spouse and being home almost exclusively with my daughter for 3 straight years. I've needed this "me time" and appreciate all my mom friends who've helped me along the way. Without them, I'd probably still have some green poop smeared on my cheek.