

PRENATAL YOGA

For many women, the first time they start to listen to their body is when they become pregnant. Once they have this awareness, they also become more inclined to regard the importance of correct nutrition and the avoidance of stimulants.

Along with this increasing awareness is quite often the desire to take up some form of exercise, which is suitable for pregnancy. Although yoga is certainly not a mere "exercise routine", its enormous benefits-physical, emotional, mental and spiritual- make it an ideal way of managing the many changes which are taking place on these levels.

Some women may already have either an existing exercise routine or an approach to yoga, which is no longer compatible with pregnancy-for example high impact aerobics, which can jar the body or a dynamic yoga style, which generates the "internal fire". They want to continue with some kind of practice and so seek out an approach which takes into account issues such as the changing centre of gravity, raised body temperature, increased blood volume and limitations of certain movements. A regular yoga class will still present prohibitions to a pregnant woman in terms of backbends, inverted postures, prone (ie face down) postures and certain pranayama (control of prana via the breath) techniques, which involve breath retention. Unless a teacher knows and understands pregnancy and how the pregnancy approach differs from the non pregnant approach the woman will not be gaining as much as she might from a her yoga class.

It generally takes about 12 weeks for fluctuating hormone levels to stabilise during pregnancy and it is important to take things easy between weeks 7-14 in particular, especially if there has been a history of miscarriage. At this stage it is better to focus more on breathing and relaxation.

Specific classes of pregnancy yoga are suitable for women with a little, a lot or no previous experience of yoga. Muscles are toned without strain, internal space is created, posture is improved, fatigue combated, stress and anxiety relieved, emotions stabilised and the endocrine system rebalanced. Relaxation and breathing techniques teach how to release tension from mind and body and are extremely useful tools to take into labour! The opportunity is given for communication and bonds to be strengthened between mother and baby and the benefits of mobility, positioning, sound and breath are explored to be used as techniques to carry into labour.

Some women may experience certain conditions associated with pregnancy. This could mean anything from sciatica to varicose veins, high or low blood pressure to heartburn, to name just a few. Pregnancy can also reawaken the "body memory" to old injuries, long forgotten about. Other conditions such as symphysis pubis dysfunction may develop and a properly trained pregnancy yoga teacher will know how to teach women presenting with these conditions.

The techniques are taught to encourage awareness of both movement and breath. This more gentle, but no less effective, approach, avoiding jolting and jarring, also gives rise to a quieter mind, so important when unaccountable anxieties and fears arise.

Preparation for labour is as much mental as physical and pregnancy yoga addresses this aspect, helping women to approach labour with more confidence and courage, particularly first time mothers. When expecting second or third babies, these women are also pleased to have extra techniques to use, which they may not have had access to during the previous labours.

The British Wheel of Yoga is an internationally recognised organisation and is the governing body for yoga in the UK. and noted for their safety in practice. They hold a list of appropriately qualified pregnancy yoga teachers, throughout the UK and can be contacted during office hours on 01529 306851 website bwy.org.uk.

Bernadette King BWYDip, ITECDipAP&M, ITECDipIHM has been teaching yoga for 20 years and has a wealth of experience. She holds the British Wheel of Yoga teaching diploma and

their pregnancy module certificate, an intensive post graduate yoga course, which offers specialist training in teaching yoga to pregnant women. She offers Birth Preparation workshops to women at least 32 weeks pregnant and their labour supporters, post natal recovery yoga for mums & babies and baby massage instruction. She is also a massage therapist and is able to offer therapeutic massage, Indian Head Massage, Reiki and one to one yoga tuition at her clinic in S.E.London. She has had many articles published and works closely with GP's & midwives.

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