



## **Pregnancy with Awareness – Creating Healthy Humans through Yoga**

### **Introduction :**

Becoming a mother may be one of the most important events in a woman's life. The creation of another human is the ultimate expression of nature's powerful life force, and the mother and father manifest a unique extension of themselves into the world. Bringing life into this world is no casual matter and it should be a conscious and a responsible choice that parents make. Ideally, conception should be planned, and the new life should be welcomed into a mother's healthy and balanced body with a positive frame of mind. However, some women lack awareness of their pregnancy in its early stages. As a result, she inadvertently deprives herself and her fetus the best possible care. Prenatal yoga practices benefits both mother and fetus and prepares the mother for a healthy natural birth. The benefits of yoga during pregnancy are widely accepted by obstetricians as a safe form of exercise when guided by a qualified teacher. In fact, yoga offers so much more than physical exercise. Appropriate practices for the various stages in the pregnancy prepares the mother physically, mentally, and emotionally to accept the challenges of pregnancy and gives her time to adjust to motherhood. Most importantly, yoga fosters awareness within the practitioner. Through yoga, an expecting mother can gain awareness of the changes taking place in her body, her mental and emotional states so she may experience delivery in the most relaxed and prepared condition as possible.

There are many conflicting emotions that women may feel when she first discovers she is pregnant, preventing her from embracing her new reality. The pregnancy may have been unexpected, perceived to be untimely or even much anticipated. She may have experienced social and family pressure to have a child when she was not ready for the responsibility or feels overwhelmed by the challenges of balancing her career and motherhood. The joy of conceiving a child is clouded by doubts and uncertainties. Fears of losing her personal freedom, autonomy over her body and individual identity are all common stress factors for many women. In addition, there is the anxiety towards the risks of labor. Needless to say, mental, emotional as well as physical health of the mother directly impacts the development of her fetus therefore her stresses and anxieties must be relieved. Regular yoga practice helps to alleviate hesitancy and ambivalence the mother may have towards her pregnancy. Yoga induces a deep physical and mental relaxation that alleviates stress and gives her the energy and stamina to confront her fears and to look forward to the changes in her life.

Practicing yoga on a regular basis prior to conceiving a baby is optimal. Nonetheless, it is not too late to begin during pregnancy. It is a safe way to maintain the health of the mother and fetus and to gain strength for the childbirth. Prenatal yoga is a suitable physical activity to accommodate for all complications a mother may experience during her pregnancy. In conjunction with a healthy diet and adequate rest, yoga guides a mother through her

pregnancy by creating strong but flexible pelvic muscles in preparation for labor, fostering awareness of her body, giving her physical and mental confidence to face delivery, and arming her with breathing practices to regain her energy when she needs it most. She will also be prepared to manage labor pains with her breathing and ability to relax. Regardless of whether a woman is ready or not, her body will naturally go into labor at the end of pregnancy. Instead of being caught off guard, yoga gives women the power to experience delivery with awareness, confidence, and courage rather than with helplessness and fear. She is empowered and ready to work with nature's course of pregnancy, not against it. There are medical emergency cases when natural childbirth is not possible, and a surgical intervention is necessary for the safety of the mother and baby. Even in these instances, yoga practitioners experience faster recoveries.

Yoga practices are essential in promoting rapid recovery of the body and regaining mental balance after a mother delivers her baby. Postpartum complications such as hormonal imbalance induced depressions, weakened pelvic floors and abdominal muscles can be managed and strengthened through yoga. A mother of a newborn is naturally depleted from the pregnancy, the recent labor, and the demands of nurturing her baby. Through suitable yoga practices, she can regain her energy and strength faster.



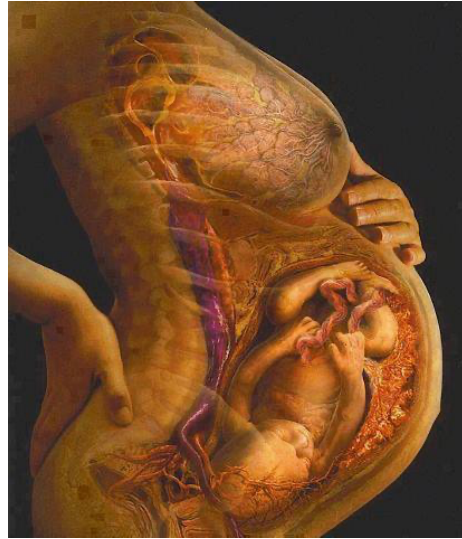
Physical activity is essential for pregnant women to maintain a healthy body and mind throughout her pregnancy. Unlike strenuous physical activities such as jogging, weight training and gymnastics which may be harmful to the fetus, prenatal yoga is suitable throughout the pregnancy. Exercise depletes energy from the body whereas yoga recharges the mother with the necessary energy to carry the baby. The first trimester is particularly a crucial period for the

development of the fetus as it creates the foundation of its physical and mental health. Women need to take care of themselves as most miscarriages occur during this period and therefore strenuous exercises must be avoided. Even yoga practices must be carefully considered as improper sequence of practices may cause physical and mental imbalances for the expecting mother. Therefore, finding a qualified prenatal yoga teacher who understands the physiology and anatomy of the human body is essential.

### **Common Signs of Pregnancy:**

It is essential to be familiar with common signs of pregnancy so that a woman may take immediate precautions to protect and nurture herself and the baby, as soon as there is a chance of her being pregnant. When signs of pregnancy, or even a possibility of it, are identified, consult a doctor, and adopt a healthy lifestyle immediately.

- Missed Periods
- Tender and Swollen breasts
- Nausea/Morning sickness/ Vomiting
- Frequent Urination
- Increased Fatigue
- Shortness of Breath
- Increased heart rate/High Blood pressure
- Motion sickness, Bloating
- Mood Swings / Body temperature changes



- **Precautions:**
- Avoid Smoking & Alcohol
- Reduce weight
- Manage Stress
- Avoid Strenuous Exercise.
- Avoid drugs
- Avoid exposure to cleaning solvents, pesticides, lead and mercury.
- Avoid long Journey/Use safety measures during travelling.
- Food (avoid oily, greasy, spicy, and processed food}

### **Changes in the Body during Pregnancy:**

Understanding and knowing the various changes a woman goes through during her pregnancy is helpful in adjusting and planning activities to promote a healthy lifestyle and to avoid any potential harm. Advanced obstetric technology makes it easier than ever before to monitor the course of the pregnancy, making individualized and timely activities possible while identifying the precautions. Though the changes may feel overwhelming, especially for the first-time mothers, these developments are normal and there is no need to be concerned.



**First month:** Many women are unaware they are pregnant in their initial stages of conception, though their bodies start changing. When ovulation occurs in the middle of the month and the egg has been fertilized, early signs of bodily changes such as swollen and sore breasts, tiredness, frequent desire to urinate, and nausea are often experienced. However, these symptoms are often mistaken as premenstrual indications and the pregnancy is overlooked until a missed period is acknowledged.

**Second Month:** Women generally starts feeling the changes as morning sickness, tiredness, heart burn and other hormone induced changes, which prepares the embryo to grow. Once the pregnancy is confirmed, women often experience emotional and heightened sensitivity due to the physiological and mental changes.

**Third month:** The uterus starts to fill the pelvis. A slight bulge in the belly becomes visible and some women gain weight while those experiencing nausea may lose weight. Skin complexion may glow or may get dark blotches and acne depending on the individual's constitution. Women may experience a decrease in libido during the first three months of their pregnancies.

The first trimester is a crucial period for the development of the fetus. It is vital for the fetus to be safe and healthy during this time as it develops the foundation of their physical and mental health. Women need to take care of themselves and be aware of their physical changes as most miscarriages occur during the first three months of their pregnancies. They must be careful of their hygiene, consuming healthy foods and avoiding toxic environments because all those factors contribute toward the baby's vital organs become fully developed and beginning to function during this period. The arms and legs, liver, gall bladder, spleen and adrenal glands are developed by the end of the third month and the respiratory system begins to develop. As the fetus rapidly develops and receives nutrients from the mother, the expecting mother experiences hiccups and dehydration.

**Fourth Month:** Having crossed the hurdle of the first trimester, the fourth month is a positive month for the baby and mother. Possibility of early miscarriage is over, and nausea and morning sickness subsides. The baby is now in the second trimester and the mother's body is better adjusted to accommodating the baby. Fetus has taken proper physical shape and it is believed that the soul also enters the baby at this time. Kidneys begin to function, and the bone marrow starts producing white blood cells to fight against various diseases. The pancreas, gall bladder, and thyroid have also developed.

**Fifth Month:** This is a momentous month as the mother starts feeling her baby. Her kidneys must work harder as they help the body adjust to extra blood volume, blood pressure changes and the added burden that pregnancy causes. The uterus expands one centimeter per week and reaches up to the navel. As the mother's organs begin to be impacted by the growing uterus, she will need to urinate frequently and may experience heart burn. Muscle aches, sore



feet, fatigue, and dizziness are other bodily changes she may experience. Baby's brain, hair, eyes will develop rapidly at this stage.

**Sixth Month:** As the growing fetus in the uterus take up more space in the mother's abdominal-pelvic cavity, she feels more impact as the pressure mounts. The mother may experience back, hip, and leg pain, and fatigue and dizziness may resurface during this time. She can feel distinct baby movements. The baby's hearing system develops at this stage and therefore responds to noise.

**Seventh Month:** In the third trimester, as the baby and belly grow, more tightness in the muscles and other organs are felt. The mother experiences back pain and sciatica (shooting pain in the nerves), dizziness, frequent urination, and weight gain. Due to the growing fetus, the mother commonly experiences growing fatigue, leg cramps and other body aches during this period. The body feels uncomfortable, sleep becomes difficult. The baby's respiratory system and organs are fully developed by this time.

**Eighth Month:** The baby's sense organs start functioning and he or she becomes more active. The baby's kicks are now visible to all, not only felt by the mother. As the belly grows, the mother's fatigue and insomnia intensify. The growing uterus pushes the diaphragm upward causing shortness of breath.

**Ninth Month:** The mother is physically and mentally ready for and anticipates labor. Frequent bouts of back and neck pain are common. Decreased mobility and intensified fatigue are to be expected as well as further increase in breast size and vaginal discharge. Mother may see increase in breasts and vaginal discharge. Comfort of the mother depends upon the baby's position. Head down position is ideal for the mother and delivery. The changes that occur in the mother's body towards the end of pregnancy gradually brings her to the start of labor. Labor is defined by contractions that are regular and dilate the cervix, ending in the birth of the baby. Mother may have a backache or flu-like symptoms. Most women will go into labor naturally between weeks 38 and 42 of their pregnancies.

Once the baby is born, it is important for the mother to focus on diet, exercise, and nutrition to recover quickly.

### **Prenatal Yogic Care & Practices:**

The following sequence of practices are recommended for expecting mothers. However, it is important to note, a qualified prenatal yoga teacher should be consulted to adjust practices to suit any special needs of a women experiencing particular issues.

## Standing Poses/ Movements

Tadasana (Palm Tree Pose)

Tiryaka Tadasana (Swaying Palm Tree Pose)

Kati Chakrasana (spinal Twist)

Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)

Dwikonasana (Two angle Pose)

Standing Forward /Backward Bending.

Chair Pose / dynamic energy Pose

These practices can be done throughout nine months for better flexibility, range of movements and to prevent back and spinal pain during later stages of pregnancy. Chair pose will strengthen leg bones and counter weakness in legs. Other standing practices can also be done with the guidance of a teacher. Standing balance and other spinal movement practices can be done in the first few months of pregnancy, but in the second and third trimester, take support of the wall for balancing poses. However, unnecessary dynamic practices must be avoided during the first trimester.



**Benefits:** Promotes flexibility, increases range of movement, encourage blood flow. Creates space in the abdominal-pelvic region for free flow of vital energy, *prana* and reduce congestion. Standing pose helps women to be more energetic and confident and develops sense of balance. Reduce complications during third trimester.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Can be safely practiced until the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> months of pregnancy. First 3 months movements should be moderate and during the 3 trimesters can take support of the wall or teacher.

**Practices:** Other standing poses like Dwikonasana (Two Angle pose), Samkonasana (Right angle Pose), Hasta Utthanasana (Hand Raise pose), Pda Hastasana (Bending forward), Druta Utkatasana (Dynamic Energy Pose) can be done with few variations according to the capacity. Almost up to second trimester women can do standing poses with slow, smooth, and moderate speed.



## Sun Salutation

**Benefits:** It is a complete practice of 12 postures done at a dynamic or moderate pace. It tones and promotes flexibility for the entire body, controls body fat and promotes good blood and energy flow.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Not recommended for those who are new to yoga, but the postures may be altered by the teacher to suit the ability of the woman. Practice must be avoided during the 1<sup>st</sup> month of pregnancy as raising the body temperature suddenly may be harmful to the fetus. Up to 3 slow rounds of the practice is recommended from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy. During the 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> month, modify the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> poses to suit the growing abdomen.

Those having any complications like weakness, back pain, dizziness, then it is better to avoid and do simple postures.

**Practice:** There are variations according to the traditions but better to practice traditional way with Mountain pose during step 5 & 8.

## Pawanmuktasana Series 1, 2 & 3:

**Benefits:** These three series of practices are the most important for pregnant women and is one of the greatest contributions by Paramahansa Satyananda of Bihar School of Yoga. The practices work on every part of the body safely, easily with almost no adverse effects. Even women having no knowledge of yoga or other exercise can do these without any difficulty.



**Pawanmuktasana Part 1:** Focuses on joint rotations to relax and open the joints, and to benefit the tissues and nerves for good flow of vital energy, *prana*. Maintains normal blood pressure and alleviates and controls morning sickness, cramps and swelling of legs. Encourages blood and energy flow to all organs.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Suitable for duration of pregnancy. No precautions.

**Practices:** All joints rotation and bending.

**Pawanmuktasana Part 2:** Focuses on strengthening the core muscles and the digestive system. Controls water retention, constipation and strengthens prepares the body for labor pain. Helps

to manage pregnancy back pain. Increased core strength gives physical and mental confidence to the woman.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Suitable up to 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> month with modifications.

**Practices:**

Single Leg lifts (Utthanpadasana)

Cycling (Pada Sanchalana)

Leg Rotations (Chakra Padasana)

Sleeping Abdominal Twist (Supta Udarakarsana)

**Pawanmuktasana Part 3:** Particularly important group of practices for women. Focus is on sitting and squatting positions to strengthen the pelvic organs, muscles and bones and promotes pain management in preparation for labor. Increases energy flow in the uterus for healthy development of the fetus.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Almost there are no precautions, but some women need to adjust while sitting in squatting pose. Those having severe knee pain should avoid squatting.



**Practices:**

Nauka sanchalasana (Rowing boat),

Chakki Chalanasana (Churning Mill),

kawa Chalasana (Crow walking),

Meru vakrasana Dynamic,

Namaskarasana,

Udarakarshasana (Squatting abdominal twist).

**Backward Bending:**

Backward bending practices becomes more difficult as the abdomen grows bigger. Though moderate backward bending poses maybe done in the first trimester, backward bending poses in the standing pose is better suited for women up to the end of the second trimester. Your prenatal yoga teacher should give you guidance depending on the abdominal size.

**Benefits:** Strengths the spine and avoids back pains



**Suitability & Precautions:** Suitable up to 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> month. Standing pose as a starting point is preferable as to not impact the fetus.

**Practices:**

Cobra Pose: 1st -3<sup>rd</sup>.

Bridge Pose can be done as an option.

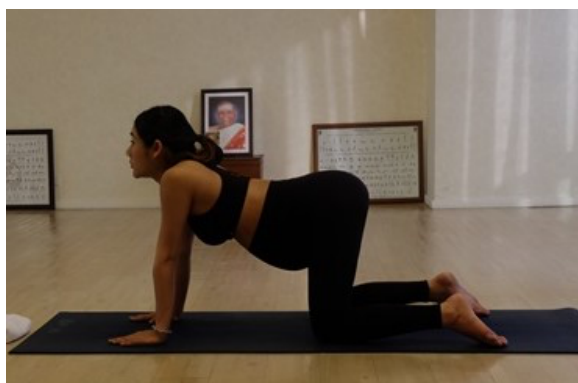
**Spinal or Vajrayana Series:**

This group of practices can be used as options for backward bending. Doing backward bending is difficult in prone position, so these practices give almost the same effect. Those who cannot sit in Vajrayana, diamond pose, due to varicose vein or knee pain, can sit in other postures or use props.

**Benefits:** These practices promote suppleness of the spine and avoids sciatica pain caused by pressed nerves along the spine as the fetus grows larger. Also strengthens all pelvic organs. These practices, such as the tiger pose, ideally should be done to strengthen the spine prior to pregnancy but other postures can be done during the pregnancy. Sitting in Vajrayana after meals helps to digestion and to promote the spinal column to be erect naturally.

**Practice:** Cat pose, Tiger pose, Camel pose, Bhadrasana (Gracious Pose), Simhagarjanasana (Roaring Lion), Ushtrasana (Half & full Camel), Shashankasana (Rabbit or child Pose)

These practices tone and massage abdominal organs and release extra pressure from spinal cord due to weight of the uterus. Promotes flow of prana around uterus and relaxes the muscles of pelvic.



(Cat pose)



(Camel pose)



### **Forward Bending:**

Head to Knee Pose (Janu Sirasana)

Seated Forward Bend (Paschimottanasana) with leg stretched to side.

It will still be comfortable to stretch hamstrings, back muscles and spinal cord in the first trimester, but during the second and third trimester, it will become progressively more difficult, and thus modifications will become necessary. In the later stages of pregnancy, forward bending's can be done in standing pose to stretch all back muscles.

**Child Pose:** Can be practiced up to 8<sup>th</sup> month depending on the size of the belly. Spread the legs apart to accommodate the fetus.

**Benefits:** Promotes suppleness of the spine.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Sitting forward bending suitable up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> month. From the 4<sup>th</sup> month on, standing forward bending is possible. Forward bending must be done in conjunction with the backward bending to counter the postures.

### **Twisting Pose:**

First 2 trimester is comfortable for sitting twisting. So better to practice few standing twisting and with lying down positing with some modification. Twisting group balances the flow of Samana vayu, which flow laterally, helping liver, kidney, Pancreas to work optimally. Massages abdominal organs and maintain the functioning of digestive system.

**Benefits:** Enhances functioning of the intestine, kidneys, pancreas, and flexibility of the spine. Promotes energy flow in the abdominal region and prevents back pain.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Standing and twisting poses are suitable up to 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> months. As the abdomen gets bigger in the last trimester, these practices should be decreased or avoided or can be done according to the capacity and range of movements.

**Practices:** Simple Twist (Meru Vakrasana), Lord of the Fish Pose/ Sitting Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana)

### **Inverted Pose:**

Legs up the Wall Pose (Vipreet karani)

Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana)



### Plough pose (Halasana)

Complete beginners and those having severe back pain or other health conditions can do Kandharasana (Bridge pose) as an option. In the later stages of pregnancy, women can use cushions or pillows under their pelvic to lift the lower body or keep legs on the wall or chair for 5 to 10 minutes. This can be very relaxing for legs and pelvic organs.

**Benefits:** Relaxes the uterus and other organs in the abdominal region and increases energy flow as the abdominal area is released from the gravitational pull in the normal upright position. These poses can counter varicose veins, swelling, numbness, cramp in legs and give relaxation to legs. Releases congestion from the pelvic area to feel lightness and relaxation in the lower body. Enhance overall blood circulation to various internal organs. During later stage of pregnancy raising legs with the support of walls are very relaxing.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Shoulder stand is suitable up to the 6<sup>th</sup> month but only with the guidance of a prenatal yoga teacher. The wall may be used to support the body or use pillows to lift the pelvis area up. Avoid head stands and other physically challenging inverted poses.

### Pranayama / Breathing Practices:

Pranayama is the most important practice of yoga. It works as coordinator between the body, the mind, and emotions. Pranayama can maintain optimum oxygen level, purifies the blood by flushes out toxins naturally and has healing effects on the mind, body, and emotions.

**Benefits:** An essential practice throughout the 9 months of pregnancy. Trains the abdominal and pelvic muscles for labor and cope with the pain. Subsides anxiety, stress, and fear. Maintains good functioning of the respiratory and digestive systems. Promotes removal of toxins from the body. Increases oxygen levels in the blood. Prevents and manages diabetes and high blood pressure complications during the pregnancy.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Suitable and safe throughout the pregnancy. Heating group of breathing practices like Bhastrika and Kapalbhathi should be done only after consulting a teacher for an individualized prescription. However, most practices are suitable for even those experiencing complications. Those having stuffed nose due to coughs and colds may find it difficult at first, but a nasal wash cleanse should make the breathing easier.

### Practices:

**Abdominal & Yogic Breathing** - These two practices can maintain health of lungs and the heart. They tone and massage all internal muscles & organs and prepares the expecting mother for labor pains. Releases pressure from uterus and promotes flow of prana in the pelvic area.



**Alternate Nose Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)** – This is the best practice to oxidize blood and sends oxygen to the fetus, keeps purifying the blood naturally and also balances the mind and emotions.



**Psychic Breathing (Ujjayi)** – By constricting the glottis, one can slow down the heart rate and induces a natural state of relaxation through the para sympathetic nervous system. This allows the pulse rate and blood pressure to decrease to a normal level. Regular practice can be useful to increase inner stability during labor.

**Humming Bee (Bhramari)** – This is useful to counter insomnia, anxiety, stress, and tension. This can be used during labor pain without closing ears and in a low tone during exhalation.

← **Humming Bee (Bhramari) breath**

**Sheetali/ Sheetkari** --- These are calming and cooling pranayama. Controls excessive excitement, anxiety, hunger, anger, thirst. Should not be done during depression, low blood pressure and in polluted surroundings.

**Bhastrika / Kapalbhati** --- These are heating pranayama and should be practiced in mild intensity from the 4<sup>th</sup> month onwards. Avoid during the first 3 months. Those having signs of depression, lethargy, migraine, or respiratory issues, can practice with breaks between the rounds. These breathing practices strengthens core muscles and activates brain cells, promoting alertness, high energy, and confidence. Regular practitioners can do 3 to 5 rounds and beginners 2 to 3 rounds, with each round consisting of 20 to 50 breaths, according to the individual's capacity.

## Yoganidra & Meditation:



**Benefits:** Yoga Nidra is a guided awareness practice to detach from the senses. The practice provides deep relaxation much needed by the expecting mother. It releases the body and mind from all worries, stresses and fears and promotes confidence and grounding. Meditation practices allow the practitioner to detach the mind from social and self-imposed stresses and accept the changes that pregnancy brings on positively. Yoga Nidra not only allows deep physical, mental, emotional relaxation but also brings about a feeling of calmness, happiness, and sense of satisfaction. It is healing and rejuvenating at all levels. Pregnant

women develop awareness of their internal changes and start connecting with the new lives growing within. A resolve (sankalpa) is made during the Yoga Nidra practice. In the case of an expecting mother, her resolve might be to have a healthy birth for her baby and herself. By developing acceptance and positivity through such a resolve, the mother can plant a seed of happiness, health, and wellbeing in the baby.

**Suitability & Precautions:** Yoga Nidra can be done in the Shavasana posture, lying down on the back, until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> month. As the weight of the abdomen causes the mother discomfort in later months, she may lie down on her side, place pillows for support or sit against a wall. It can also be practiced sitting on a chair or bed with her legs relaxed. If she is comfortable and can stay still in her posture, there is no precautions for this practice.

**Practice:** Yoga Nidra, Breath Awareness, Mantra Awareness (Ajapa Japa), Inner Silence Meditation (Antar Mouna) Guided audio available or with experienced teacher

**Intoxicating Bliss Pose (Anand Madirasana):** During second and third trimester, it becomes difficult for the pregnant woman to sleep on her back any longer. She starts to feel back pain due to the weight of the growing uterus. So, this sitting posture with bent knees can be very relaxing for the spine to counter back pain. The best lying down position at this stage is to lay on her right or left side and the weight of the belly should be beside the body on the floor. Hands and legs can be adjusted according to the comfort.





Placing cushion under back is also relaxing to manage back pain during second and third trimester.

### **Mantra & Music:**

**Benefits:** The vibration of the sounds of mantras have a powerful and profound effect on the mother and the fetus. The sound promotes healthy and balanced development of the fetus as well as giving mental strength and balance to the mother. Listening to soft and soothing instrumental music also has a calming and relaxing effects.

**Suitability & Precautions:** There are no precautions to these practices. Mantra chanting in the morning helps to start the day in a positive mindset.

**Practices :** Chanting Om, Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, Gayatri Mantra, listening to soothing instrumental music or Classic music and other soft music of choice.

By using combination of all groups of asana and pranayama, women can manage problems such as backaches, varicose veins, fatigue, swelling, leg cramps, shortness of breath, mood swings or other complications.

### **Diet:**

Correct and balanced diet can manage problems such as acidity, heart burn, constipation and bloating which are common discomforts experienced by pregnant women. Daily food intake should be divided into 5 or 6 meals. This helps for easier digestion with smaller portions consumed at a time and refuels the body with frequent calorie intake. Protein should be consumed in moderation because it takes more time to digest. Seasonal organic foods are best as they provide roughage and fibre to counter constipation and are full of much needed vitamins and minerals. Try to consume the necessary vitamins and minerals through fresh, unprocessed foods rather than with supplements. Of course, there are times when a pregnant woman may need additional supplements due to their condition, in which case she must follow the guidance of a doctor or a nutritionist. However, in general, it is preferable to consume the necessary vitamins, minerals, iron, calcium, folate, and folic acid through fresh foods rather than in chemical form. Drink lots of water and or non-caffeine and low sugar liquids. Also, reduce the intake of caffeine, hot, spicy, and oily foods to prevent gas, bloating and other digestive issues. Always remember; you are not only feeding yourself, but also your baby.



## **Mental and Emotional Diet:**

Just as toxic foods should not be consumed by pregnant women, neither should she consume toxicity through her other senses. Everything she sees, hears, feels, and thinks impacts her mental and emotional state which in-turn impacts her fetus through the sense organs. This means the expecting mother should try to remove herself from negative situations and people who make her feel anxious or stressed. She should focus on positive thoughts and avoid literature or media full of negativity. She should engage in hobbies, creative endeavors, getting in touch with nature or other activities which brings her joy and wellness. By doing so, she is protecting her fetus from negativity and giving a positive start to its life. Pregnancy hormones naturally makes a woman feel more vulnerable and sensitive so follow your natural instincts and dwell in peaceful and happy thoughts. Do create a resolve (sankalpa) for the child. The expecting mother should formulate a clear thought of what she wishes for her baby, good health, strength, confidence, kindness, etc. The resolve would send positive energy directly to the fetus and at the same time, strengthen the mother to accept her new role.

## **A Positive Pregnancy and Birthing Experience through Yoga**

A soul waits for a healthy and loving body to reside in, to manifest into the physical world. Prenatal yogic care allows the expecting mother to provide her fetus with the best nurturing environment that her body can offer. Yoga practices gives her mental strength and clarity to accept the changes and challenges that pregnancy brings on without fear and anxiety. Through awareness, she will understand that every cell in her body is communicating with the fetus and catering towards creating a new life. This awareness leads her to acceptance of her new reality without resistance nor hesitation. When the mother physically, mentally, and emotionally welcomes the fetus as her precious new guest in her world, then trust, harmony and wellbeing is established and both mother and child can flourish.



However, complications do happen at times. Many women have experienced miscarriages or failed fertility treatments, which are both traumatic for the body and soul. Imbalance in the woman's body could be one potential reason why her body rejects the fetus as a foreign entity on a biological level. Regular yoga practice can restore balance and promote wellness so she may feel whole again.

Becoming a parent should be a conscious choice and the responsibilities entailed should be accepted whole heartedly. Embracing a yogic lifestyle prepares you physically, mentally, and emotionally for conception, pregnancy, delivery, postpartum recovery, and challenges of motherhood. Let yoga guide you through the journey of giving life so you may be aware and enjoy every moment of it.