

Six reasons to take up yoga during pregnancy

February 10 2023, by Anjali Raj Westwood



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While you may need to modify your exercise routine slightly during pregnancy, physical activity is safe, and in fact [recommended](#), when you're expecting a baby.

One option you might consider is prenatal [yoga](#). Yoga is suitable even for [women](#) who don't tend to do a lot of exercise.

Yoga is an [ancient practice](#) from India involving movement, meditation and breathing techniques to promote mental and physical well-being. There's a [growing body of research](#) on the benefits of yoga during pregnancy.

Prenatal yoga is safe for mother and baby when practiced [under guidance](#) from a certified instructor, and is suitable for both [low- and high-risk pregnancies](#). Here are six reasons you should include prenatal yoga in your pregnancy routine.

1. Mental health

Are you anxious about your pregnancy? Does thinking of childbirth give rise to a [sense of fear](#)? If so, you're not alone. It's estimated that [one in five](#) pregnant and [postpartum women](#) experience some form of anxiety.

High levels of stress and anxiety during pregnancy can increase the risk of [preterm birth](#), [longer labor](#), and the need for [interventions](#) including induction, sedation and cesarean section.

Yoga can help [reduce anxiety](#) and stress levels. Even a single session of prenatal yoga has been found to reduce anxiety around childbirth in [low-risk mothers](#). And for pregnant women with [diagnosed depression](#), yoga has been shown to reduce depressive symptoms and anxiety.

Many mothers also worry about whether they will be able to bond with their babies. By improving mental well-being and building a greater sense of connection with the body, yoga has been shown [to increase](#) a mother's feeling of attachment to her [unborn child](#).

2. Help with aches and pains

It's common for pregnant women to have pain around the pelvic area (lower back, hips and thighs). One study found a short course of ten yoga sessions reduced [overall pain](#) in this area.

Other research has shown prenatal yoga helps reduce a variety of [pregnancy discomforts](#) including varicose veins and ankle swelling.

3. Blood pressure control

Pregnancy-induced hypertension ([high blood pressure](#)) can be dangerous. In particular, it can lead to a complication called preeclampsia, which can be life-threatening for both mother and baby.

For [pregnant women](#) with high blood pressure, practicing yoga has been shown to [bring it down](#). Likewise, prenatal yoga has been found to reduce incidences of [preeclampsia](#).

4. Reducing blood sugar

Some women develop [gestational diabetes](#) during pregnancy, which is when their body doesn't produce enough insulin, the hormone that controls blood sugar.

For mothers with this condition, prenatal yoga, along with dietary changes, can help reduce [blood sugar levels](#). Even regular yoga practice for seven to ten days has been shown to [reduce blood sugar levels](#) in patients with [gestational diabetes](#).

Well-controlled [blood sugar](#) levels can help [prevent](#) further complications that can arise with gestational diabetes such as preterm birth, having a large baby, the baby developing jaundice, and stillbirth.

5. Improving sleep

[Almost half of pregnant women](#) experience some level of sleep disturbance, and sleep quality gets worse in the third trimester. Women who sleep less during pregnancy have [higher incidences](#) of anxiety.

A key part of prenatal yoga is *pranayama*, or breathing exercises, which are believed to help [improve quality of sleep](#).

6. Strength and confidence

After attending [yoga classes](#), women have reported [feelings of strength](#) and confidence. Increased confidence and physical competence may enable women to remain calmer and help them [take greater control](#) during labor.

Yoga has been shown to be associated with [reduced pain during labor](#) and [shorter duration of labor](#).

While research shows prenatal yoga is beneficial and safe, there are only a limited number of studies investigating each benefit, and they have small sample sizes. It would be good to see larger studies on this topic.

That said, if you're pregnant, prenatal yoga is a worthwhile investment you can make in your physical and [mental health](#).

Choosing the right class

Looking for a class may be confusing as there are [several types of yoga](#). The forms most suited to pregnancy are Hatha yoga, which is slower paced, or Iyengar yoga, which uses props for support.

You can find providers through a quick internet search or on directories such as [Mumbler](#) in the UK. You may have a choice between private and group classes. In a group class, you'll have a chance to meet other pregnant mothers—an added bonus. A private session offers a tailored approach and individual attention from the instructor.

If you're a beginner, attending virtual classes isn't recommended as there will be no one to check your posture and help you avoid injuries.

If you're enquiring about a group session, check if it's a mixed class or only prenatal. It's always better to choose a prenatal session. Also, ask for your instructor's credentials in prenatal yoga. It's a different certification from general yoga.

In your first class, the instructor will ask you about any injuries or [pregnancy](#) complications so they can give you modifications if needed. At any point, if you feel dizzy or in pain, stop and tell your instructor. They can support and guide you.

Most importantly, remember to enjoy the experience. The physical and psychological benefits will follow.

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