

Role and Importance of Yoga during Pregnancy

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Abstract

Yoga in pregnancy is intended to create a balance between emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions. Pregnancy is a special time in any woman's life and can be one of the most joyful experiences. A golden rule to keep in mind when practicing yoga during pregnancy is to listen to your body and stop immediately if you experience any discomfort. Yoga is not just about twisting and turning the body, when done correctly it can be extremely beneficial especially during pregnancy. prenatal yoga can benefit both mother and child. Prenatal yoga focuses on breathing techniques and gentle stretching. Prenatal yoga is about helping mother prepare for childbirth by relaxing the body and focusing on safe techniques and poses in all stages of pregnancy. The challenges of pregnancy are revealed by the state of happiness and stress while yoga is a skill to calm down the mind. Pregnancy in a woman is a condition in which woman changes both from inside as well as outside. These changes create obstacles or hurdles in the normal life of a pregnant woman and yoga in pregnancy can help the women to cruise through these changes and challenges. It focuses on gentle stretches, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques that are safe and beneficial during pregnancy. Unlike regular yoga, prenatal yoga avoids intense poses and focuses on movements that improve flexibility, strength, and balance, while also easing common pregnancy discomforts like back pain and swelling. Beyond the physical benefits, prenatal yoga, Dhyan and Mudra's helps moms-to-be stay emotionally balanced and calm, preparing both body and mind for labour and delivery. All these things provide holistic health benefits for to-be-mothers. Yoga during pregnancy helps keep the body supple. They relieve tension around the cervix by opening up the pelvic region. This prepares to-be-mothers for labour and delivery. Yoga, Dhyan and Mudra's helps in pregnancy alleviate the effect of common symptoms such as morning sickness, painful leg cramps, swollen ankles, and constipation. Yoga asanas, Dhyan and Mudra's are also help pregnant women recover faster post-delivery.

INTRODUCTION-

Derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj" which means "to unite or integrate" yoga is a 5,000+ year old Indian body of knowledge. Yoga is all about harmonizing the body with the mind and breath through the means of various breathing exercises, yoga asanas (yoga poses) and meditation. Though many think of yoga only as a physical exercise where people twist, turn, stretch, and breathe in the most complex ways, these are actually only the most superficial aspect of this profound science of unfolding the infinite potentials of the human mind and soul.

The science of Yoga imbibe itself the complete essence of the Way of Life, including - Gyan Yoga or philosophy, Bhakti Yoga or path of devotional bliss, Karma Yoga or path of blissful action, and Raja Yoga or path of mind control. Raja Yoga is further divided into eight parts. At the heart of the Raja Yoga system, balancing and unifying these various approaches, is the practice of Yoga Asana.

Pregnancy is a special time in any woman's life and can be one of the most joyful experiences. A golden rule to keep in mind when practicing yoga during pregnancy is to listen to your body and stop immediately if you experience any discomfort. Yoga is not just about twisting and turning the body, when done correctly it can be extremely beneficial especially during pregnancy. Pregnancy is an incredibly special time in a woman's life. Creating life and carrying another soul inside your body for nine months gives new meaning to your life, and might even be giving you strength to cheerfully bear the long list of complaints that pregnancy often brings.

Role and Importance of Yoga during pregnancy:

1. Physical Health:

Yoga asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing exercises), and meditation help pregnant women maintain flexibility, strength, and balance, while also easing common pregnancy discomforts like back pain, swelling, and fatigue.

2. Mental Wellbeing:

Yoga and meditation promote relaxation, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve sleep quality, fostering a calm and positive emotional state for the mother.

3. **Fetal Development:**

Yoga can positively impact fetal development by improving blood circulation, oxygen supply, and potentially influencing the baby's cognitive and behavioural development.

4. **Preparation for Labor:**

Prenatal yoga can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles and improve breathing techniques, potentially making labour and delivery smoother.

5. **Emotional Balance:**

Yoga helps pregnant women stay emotionally balanced and calm, preparing them for the physical and emotional challenges of childbirth.

6. **Garbh Sanskar Practices:**

Yoga is a key component of Garbh Sanskar, an ancient Indian practice that aims to positively influence the unborn child's development through various nurturing practices.

7. **Positive Mindset:**

By promoting relaxation and positive thinking, yoga contributes to a positive mental state for the mother, which can have a beneficial impact on the baby's development.

In essence, yoga in Garbh Sanskar offers a holistic approach to pregnancy, supporting both the physical and mental health of the mother while also nurturing the developing child.

Prenatal Yoga

Prenatal yoga is a type of yoga for pregnant women to support their changing bodies and growing babies. It focuses on gentle stretches, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques that are safe and beneficial during pregnancy. Unlike regular yoga, prenatal yoga avoids intense poses and focuses on movements that improve flexibility, strength, and balance, while also easing common pregnancy discomforts like back pain and swelling. Beyond the physical benefits, prenatal yoga helps moms-to-be stay emotionally balanced and calm, preparing both body and mind for labor and delivery.

For numerous individuals, pregnancy is the beginning of an awesome adventure; it is full of excitement and expectations. However, the first trimester comes with its own set of hurdles

for some, encompassing physical aches and emotional disturbances. Engaging in yoga at this time may be quite beneficial for overall well-being, reducing discomfort and establishing more intimacy with growing baby.

Some poses in Yoga that have been specifically for pregnancy- Yogasanas are divided in three

categories according to pregnancy trimesters.

- 1. First Trimester Yoga Poses or Asanas (0 to 12 weeks).**
- 2. Second Trimester Yoga Poses or Asanas (13 to 27 weeks).**
- 3. Third Trimester Yoga Poses or Asanas (28 weeks – till birth).**

Yoga poses during First Trimester (0 to 12 weeks) of pregnancy and their benefits.

1. Marjariasana (Cat-Cow Pose)

- Increases Spinal Mobility.
- Back Pain and Tension Relief.
- Vascular Engagements and Improvements.

2. Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

- It Fosters Balance and Stability.
- It Strengthens the Legs and Core Muscles.
- It Promotes Deep Breathing and Relaxation.

3. Konasana – (Angle Pose)

- Mildly Stretches Side Areas.
- Improves Uterine Health and Enhances Ovarian Performance.
- Reduces General Discomforts Related to Pregnancy.

4. Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose)

- Opens The Hips and Groin Area.
- Improves Flexibility in the Lower Body.
- Relieves Fatigue and Promotes Relaxation.

5. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Dog)

- Strengthens Arms, Legs and Core Muscles.
- Increases Blood Flow to the Brain.
- Helps Relieve Tension and Stress.

Some precautions in Yoga for the First Trimester (0 week to 12 week)-

1. Learn under a qualified teacher.
2. Continue with your practice throughout your pregnancy.
3. Be gentle with your body.
4. Adjust your practice to accommodate your baby.
5. Relax into mindfulness.
6. Trust in yourself.

Yoga poses during second trimester (13 to 27 weeks) of pregnancy and their benefits-

The second trimester encompasses the glory days, or the so-called “honeymoon days”, of pregnancy. Your morning sickness has probably passed (or will do so soon), you may find yourself more energetic, and your belly is growing but hasn’t yet begun to hamper your ability to move freely. This is the time to get into the rhythm of regular yoga practice.

1. Vajrasana (Thunderbolt pose)

This asana enhances digestive system which increases the energy uptake. Alters blood flow and nervous system impulses in the pelvic region. Relieves stomach ailments like hyperacidity and it is the only asana that can be practiced after taking meals.

2. Marjariasana (Cat stretch pose)

Is very helpful in toning the female **reproductive system and muscles of pelvis**. This asana **increases the flexibility of neck, spine and shoulders muscles** which are essential for bearing down efforts during labour.

3. Matsyakridasan (Flapping fish pose)

Stimulates digestion and relieves constipation. It relaxes the nerves of legs and this is an ideal asana for relaxed sleep. It improves blood circulation.

4. Tadasan (Mountain pose)

Stretches the entire spine and helps to clear the congestion of spinal nerves. It also helps in developing physical and mental balance. It stretches and strengthens the rectus-abdominus muscle which is an accessory muscle for bearing down.

5. Bhadrasan (Gracious pose)

This asana benefits the digestive system and helps in relieving various stomach ailments. It helps in toning the muscles of female pelvic region. Along with meditation, it relieves mental stress.

Some precautions in yoga practice during second trimester (13 to 27 weeks)-

1. Be gentle with yourself and respect your body's boundaries.
2. Listen closely to what your body needs.
3. Don't strain your abdominal muscles.
4. Limit the time you spend on your back.
5. Be mindful of your belly.
6. Explore new ways of practicing.
7. Practice with your baby.
8. Focus on the mental aspect of yoga over the physical.

Yoga poses during third trimester (28 weeks – till birth) of pregnancy and their benefits-

With the onset of the third trimester, extra weight may be causing a considerable discomfort. The pressure of your large belly on the internal organs may result in heartburn, frequent urination, lower back pain, cramping in the front and side abdominals, shortness of breath, interrupted sleep, difficulty moving, and clumsiness. You might have unstable joints due to

the hormone relaxin, which allows your pelvis to widen so that you can deliver, and you may experience dizziness as well as swelling in the hands and feet because of slowed circulation caused by the hormone progesterone.

1.Pornatitaliasan (Full butterfly)

Tones up pelvic girdle. It relieves the tension from inner thigh muscles and removes the tiredness of legs. This asana increases the stretching ability of perineum.

2. Ardhatitaliasan (Half butterfly)

Is an excellent asana for loosening of hip joints, which enables fast and easy delivery.

3. Chakkichalanasan (Churning mill pose)

Is an excellent asana for toning the nerves and muscles of pelvis and abdomen and prepare them for delivery.

4. Utthanasan (Squat and Rise pose)

This asana strengthens the muscles of back, uterus, thighs and ankles. It tones up the pelvic girdle and this asana is equivalent to sweeping floor. Thus enables fast and easy delivery.

5.Pranayam (Breathing Technique) -

Pranayam is not only helpful in pregnancy but is a gift given by Ayurveda to human race for long life. Pranayam is practice of complete, prolonged and slow breathing. It works on both mind and soul. Pranayam provides extra oxygen to every cell which energizes and rejuvenates them. It should be practiced every day. It tones up the nervous system, improves emotional stability and helps to eliminate anxiety, fears and phobia. It improves breathing capacity and also increases stamina and vitality.

a) Anulom Vilom Pranayam

It strengthens the body mentally as well as physically. During labour, holding of breath for maximum duration can provide great help for pushing during labour. It provides more oxygen to the body so more oxygen is transferred to the fetus.

b) Bhramaripranayam

It is the effective breathing exercise to release agitation, anger and calms the mind. It is very useful for pregnant women because it eases the process of childbirth by controlling the breathing during the process of labour. It improves concentration and removes toxin from body.

Some precautions in yoga practice during third trimester (28 weeks – till birth)-

1. Accept and respect your new shape and size.
2. Use your practice to create more space for your baby.
3. Add an extra dose of balancing asanas.
4. Avoid inversions, backbends, and intense abdominal work.
5. Emphasize pranayama over asana.
6. Favor lying on your side over lying on your back.
7. Eat a diet high in Calcium.

Dhyana (Meditation) –

Dhyana is an integral part of yoga. It is a practice in which an individual trains the mind which includes techniques designed to promote relaxation and build internal energy. Its goal is to increase focus and calms the mind, eventually reaching a higher level of awareness.

- Meditation initiates a healing process and aids in the overall well-being of the baby.
- Meditation is all about increasing the life force or *prana* in the body. During a time when you need a lot of energy for the growth of the baby, practicing meditation can prove to be very beneficial for both the mother and child.
- Meditation directly affects your diet. The body stops craving junk food. Awareness dawns, and you are able to make healthier food choices. This is vital for the proper nourishment of the baby.
- Mood swings and emotional upheavals are common during pregnancy. As the baby's senses develop, it can sense every emotion that you undergo. It is very important that you stay happy, relaxed, and peaceful.

- Meditation relaxes your mind and helps you cope effectively at the emotional level. It is also an excellent way to relax your body. It can help release the pressure on the spinal cord so that you feel more comfortable during the last phase of your pregnancy.
- Hectic lifestyles have made hypertension and diabetes a common occurrence during pregnancy. Meditation can help deal with these issues so that the mother has a higher chance of natural delivery without complications.

Murda's for Pregnancy

Mudra” is a Sanskrit term that means “gesture” or “attitude”. Mudras are energy-flowing postures meant to connect individual ‘*pranic*’ force with universal or cosmic force. A mudra can be a simple hand position or it can encompass the entire body in a combination of Asana, Pranayama, Bandha, and visualization methods.

सर्वद्रव्यं पांचभौतिकमस्मिन्नथे।

(चरक सुत्रस्थान)

As per Ayurveda, the Human body is made up of five basic elements named “*Pancha mahabhutas*” namely – *Prithvi* (earth), *Aap* (Water), *Tej*(fire), *Vayu* (air), *Aakash* (space).

Five fingers of the hand represent these five elements.

1. The thumb represents the Fire element (*Agni mahabhuta*) and is associated with stomach and emotions like worry.
2. The index finger represents the Air element (*Vayu mahabhuta*) and is associated with lungs, large intestine, and emotions like depression, sadness, and grief.
3. The middle finger represents the Space element (*Akash Mahabhuta*) and is associated with the heart, small intestine, circulatory and respiratory systems, and emotions like impatience and hastiness.
4. The ring finger represents the Earth element (*Prithvi Mahabhuta*) and is associated with the liver, gallbladder, nervous system, and emotions like anger.
5. The little finger represents the Water element (*Jala Tatva*) and is associated with kidneys and emotions like fear.

Some Mudras beat stress in pregnancy-

1.Gyan Mudra – The Bonding Mudra

This mudra symbolizes the union of the self with the universe. During pregnancy, mothers are the universe for her baby so this mudra helps to bond with her baby very deeply.

It helps relax the body and focus of the mind, easing tension and depression, stimulating the brain, empowering the mind, nervous system, and pituitary gland, enhance concentration and prevent insomnia and other sleep disorders.

2. Vayu Mudra

Vayu is a Sanskrit word that means air or wind. Vayu Mudra is a hand gesture that helps to regulate the air element inside the body.

This immediately helps in the problems due to excess gas in the stomach, feeling of bloatedness and flatulence, and eases constipation. It improves mental strength, headaches, dizziness, overcome the hormonal imbalance of endocrine glands like the thyroid and reduces hiccoughs during pregnancy.

3. Prana Mudra

The Prana Mudra represents the life force and vitality. This mudra strengthens the immune system and activates the body's energy.

Helps in the proper functioning of the lungs, energizes the heart, removes vitamin deficiency chronic fatigue, helps in proper blood circulation, preventing edema, varicose veins, Cures muscle cramps in the legs and pain in the lower limbs, joint pain like carpal tunnel syndrome, sciatica, improve eyesight which weakens during pregnancy and childbirth, Stimulate joy, energy, delight, zeal, hope, and perseverance and enhances immunity during pregnancy.

4. Varun Mudra

Varun Mudra is also known as *Jal-Vardhak mudra* enhances the water element in the body.

Helps in dehydration caused by vomiting during pregnancy, purifies the blood and improves blood circulation in the body ensuring a good supply of nutrients to the baby in the womb, helpful in removing skin disease and also makes the skin beautiful, especially in conditions

like pregnancy masks or chloasma, In sour belching and constipation, UTIs (urinary tract infections) and improve the amniotic fluid levels.

Conclusion

Doing gentle activities during the all trimester of your pregnancy can be beneficial from the physical perspective, but also dealing with the emotional side of things. While self-care is important, connecting with your baby is also crucial, and the aforementioned positions are a great way to stay active. It is the best practice to engage yourself fully in every session and also be open-minded about it so that you can learn to modify it as per the situation. If practised regularly over time, the symptoms of fatigue, nausea, and anxiety can all lessen, which in turn helps you prepare your body for the future.

Yoga, Dhyan and Mudra's in pregnancy can improve birth weight, decrease pre-term labour, decreased intra uterine growth retardation (IUGR) with least or no complications. Practicing all these things reduces the mental stress; manage pain and symptoms of depression. So, Yoga, Dhyan and Murda's must be included in the pregnancy regime to attain the higher level of fitness for both mother and child.

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