

YAC Reorientation Series 3: A Guide to Prenatal Yoga

By Yogananth Andiappan

Prenatal Yoga is a tailor-made yoga sequence involving asanas, pranayama, concentration, meditation, and relaxation practices. Although yoga during pregnancy has always taught as a yoga therapy, it has only been referred to as *prenatal yoga* since the past decade.



Stages of Pregnancy

- 1st Trimester, Weeks 1 – 12
- 2nd Trimester, Weeks 13 – 28
- 3rd Trimester, Weeks 29 – 40

Starting Yoga During Pregnancy

- 1) If the expectant mother has never done yoga before, we suggest she waits until the 2nd trimester to begin her practice.
- 2) If she has been practicing yoga, we suggest she continue but she should avoid certain poses and modify others.
- 3) Yoga practice for pregnancies resulting from in vitro fertilization (IVF) should only proceed with a doctor's permission and can start from 2nd trimester if there are no complications

Benefits of Yoga During Pregnancy

- Promotes circulation and hormonal balance
- Relieves muscle fatigue, tension, aches, and pain
- Improves sleep quality and decreases pregnancy-induced hypertension
- Prevents back problems, strengthens the abdominal and pelvic floor muscles

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Prenatal Yoga Class Sequence

Stage 1

- Standing breath and body awareness
- Arm rotations
- Neck rotation
- Shoulder stretches that focus on all movements
- Lateral stretch
- Standing twist
- Hip rotations
- Triangle pose, modified to use block support and to look forward
- Cat pose
- Cat pose twisting, 1st variation with straight arms
- Lunge pose, move the leg away from the tummy
- Downward facing dog, open the legs wider
- Gate pose
- Butterfly pose
- Seated lateral stretch
- Folding the legs, Fish pose with the bolster supporting the back
- Supine leg stretch, rest on the side after the pose

Stage 2 – Add the following:

- Frog Pose
- Seated Split or legs wider forward bend
- Half Shoulder stand against the wall – up to 2nd trimester



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General Pregnancy Complications

- Body aches such as sciatic, groin, backache, and knees
- Sensitive breasts due to hormonal changes
- Constipation can be caused by hormonal changes and expanding uterus
- Dizziness can result from the growth of blood vessels and the uterus pressing on blood vessels
- Fatigue and sleep problems can occur because during pregnancy, the body requires more rest; also, pregnancy-associated nervousness takes a lot of energy
- Heartburn and indigestion is induced by hormones causing gastric valves to relax. This is common during 2nd and 3rd trimester
- Hemorrhoids sometimes occur during pregnancy because the expanding uterus puts pressure on the rectum
- Itching may occur because of expanding skin
- Leg cramps can result from poor walking and standing habits and dehydration
- Morning sickness is a common result of hormonal changes
- Nasal problems, such as bleeding, are the result of an increased amount of blood and sensitive nasal tissues
- Swelling in legs and hands is a result of water retention

Frequency of Yoga Practice

- Class duration should be 40 – 90 minutes depending on the participant's energy level and regularity of practice
- Depending on the participant's needs, daily practice is recommended. However, if the class lasts longer than 60 minutes, include more breathing, meditation, and relaxation exercises
- Three times a week is a regular practice for people those who do other exercise routine

Points to Note While Teaching A Prenatal Class

- Analyze each person separately. Understand each body's limitations and take into consideration their history of injury and or other ailments
- Avoid prolonged supine postures from the 2nd trimester onwards. After completing a pose, participants can lay down on their side and rest, instead of resting on their backs
- Avoid prone postures and deep internal twisting postures. Modify with external twisting poses.
- Avoid holding the poses for long periods. 20 – 30 seconds is an ideal holding time.
- Give some rest between each posture
- Hormones secreted by the body during pregnancy soften connective tissue and enable the body to stretch and expand more than normal. Therefore, limit the postures that stretch the abdominal muscles and avoid holding these poses for too long
- Avoid using the blocks against the spine, pelvis to modify the poses. Instead use bolsters and pillows
- Half-inversions can be done with proper modifications and proper guidance
- Avoid Vinyasa or dynamic movements
- Avoid breath retention in breathing exercises and while practicing Bandhas
- Use the wall support to avoid injury as balancing postures can be challenging from the 2nd trimester onwards

When Pregnant Women Should Not Do Yoga

- Severe vaginal bleeding
- If they have a high risk of miscarriage and or if the doctor does not advise



Yogananth Andiappan Community (YAC) is a non-profit, fully volunteer organization of **International Yoga Academy (IYA)** certified yoga instructors who believe in the benefits of yoga and are committed to sharing their experience with others as a service to the community. YAC members teach yoga to anyone and everyone on a strictly volunteer basis. YAC is especially committed to sharing yoga with those who may not be able to afford classes, as well as those who have special needs or circumstances.