

Yoga During Pregnancy

Pregnancy is not a good time to start a yoga practice! However, if you had a regular yoga practice before your pregnancy and your doctor approves, it is ok for you to practice yoga with modifications and at a modified pace. Yoga can be very beneficial for pregnant women — it helps you breathe and relax, which in turn can help you adjust to the physical demands of pregnancy, labor, birth, and motherhood. It calms both mind and body, providing the physical and emotional stress relief your body needs throughout the experience of pregnancy.

The body produces a hormone throughout pregnancy called relaxin, which is intended to soften your inflexible parts (like bones and ligaments) to make room for the baby and prepare for birth. This softening of the ligaments can make them vulnerable to over stretching. Avoid going further into poses than you are accustomed because an over stretched ligament is a serious injury that will not easily heal. Be especially aware of your knees.

If you have not practiced yoga before your pregnancy how will you know when you are overstretching? It's better to be safe than put yourself or your baby at risk. Wait several months after the birth of your baby to begin your yoga practice.

Twists: Avoid deep twists during pregnancy. Deep twists from the belly compress the internal organs, including the uterus. Instead twist more gently from the shoulders, or take an open twist, which means twisting away from your forward leg.

Jumps: Avoid jumping.

Pranayama: Any pranayama requiring breath retention or rapid inhales and exhales should not be practiced. **Instead:** Practice the birthing breath, deep inhales through the nose and exhales through the mouth.

Inversions: GO TO THE WALL OR AVOID! **Instead:** Practice Legs Up the Wall Pose until the 36th week.

Backbending: In general, avoid deep backbends like Full Wheel pose. **Instead:** Bridge Pose or Supported Bridge Pose with a block under the sacrum.

Abdominal work: Poses such as Boat Pose that are purely abdominal strengtheners should be avoided. Your abs should be allowed to soften to allow for the stretching that is to come.

Lying on the belly: Poses such as Cobra in which you lie on the belly should be avoided as soon as you start to show.

Lying on the back: Don't do any asanas (poses) on your back after the first trimester — it can reduce blood flow to the uterus. Your doctor may encourage you to sleep on your side. Practice Corpse Pose - Savasana lying on your left side with the knees bent. You may want to use blankets or bolsters for support to make yourself comfortable. If you eventually cannot get comfortable lying down, you can also sit up in a cross-legged position.

Hot Yoga: Raising your body's core temperature is not recommended during pregnancy, therefore Hot Yoga should not be practiced. Working out in an overheated room or becoming overheated could **endanger the health of your growing fetus**.

* When bending forward, hinge from the hips, leading with the breastbone and extending the spine from the crown of the head down to the tailbone. This allows more space for the ribs to move, which makes breathing easier. * Keep the pelvis in a neutral position during poses by engaging the abdominals and slightly tucking the tailbone down and in. This helps relax the muscles of your buttocks (your glutes) and the hip flexors, which can help reduce or prevent sciatic pain down the back of the leg, a common side effect of pregnancy. It also helps prevent injury to the connective tissue that stabilizes your pelvis. * If you're bending forward while seated, place a towel or yoga strap behind your feet and hold both ends. Bend from the hips and lift the chest, to avoid compressing your abdomen. If your belly is too big for this movement, try placing a rolled-up towel under your buttocks to elevate the body, and open the legs about hip-width apart, to give your belly more room to come forward.

* Listen carefully to your body. If you feel any discomfort, stop. You will probably need to modify each pose as your body changes.

In general, these poses are safe in pregnancy:

Butterfly stretch

Cat-Cow

Cobra (in the first trimester, if you feel comfortable doing this face-down pose)

Seated forward bend (with modifications as described above)

Side angle pose

Standing forward bend (with chair for modification)

Triangle pose (with chair for modification)

These poses should be avoided:

Backbends

Balancing poses on one leg (unless supported by chair or wall)

Camel

Handstands

Headstands

Upward bow

As always, make sure to consult with your prenatal healthcare provider before starting any exercise regime, or if at any time you have questions regarding the appropriateness of prenatal yoga for you.

For the first trimester, standing Yoga Poses are advised as this will help strengthen the legs, promote **Circulation**, generate energy, and may reduce leg cramps. It is also advisable to do some stretching such as the hamstrings stretch to avoid **Sciatica**.

During the second and third trimester, you may reduce your time spent for practicing the Asanas to prevent fatigue and overwork.

It is also not advised to practice from the tenth to through the fourteenth week of Pregnancy since these are crucial times.

Supine poses, backbends, and twisting can also be done with modification or if the body is on an incline. Do not overstretch the abdomen; the emphasis of your twisting poses should be on the shoulders and the upper back and not on the abdomen. Avoid doing inversion poses though some experienced Yoga practitioners usually still feel comfortable doing this until the seventh month.

Pregnant Yoga students may have to avoid Yoga if they have:

- A history of miscarriage
- Low weight for age of baby
- Persistent 2nd and 3rd Trimester Bleeding

Important First Trimester "Red Flags"

Yoga practice should be avoided if a student has:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Dizziness

The student's doctor should be consulted or officially notified in the case of the following:

- Student experiences pain not related to Yoga practice
- Student feels faint
- Student has heart palpitations
- Student feels a rapid heart beat
- Student is short of breath
- Student has difficulty walking
- Student experiences back pain

Even More Precautions for Prenatal Yoga

- After 20 weeks no supine postures
- Avoid brisk exercise in hot and humid weather
- Drink plenty of water
- Consume 300 extra calories for the baby
- Wear comfortable, cool, and supportive clothing