

Guidelines for Practicing Yoga when Pregnant

Yoga can be helpful during pregnancy, as long as you take certain precautions. Yoga can help mums-to-be:

- Improve sleep.
- Reduce stress and anxiety.
- Increase the strength, flexibility and endurance of muscles needed for childbirth.
- Decrease lower back pain, nausea, carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms, headaches and shortness of breath.

We encourage you to attend dedicated prenatal yoga classes at one of the yoga studios listed at the end of this guide.

Please talk to your regular yoga teacher if you wish to continue your yoga practice at Centenary Yoga during your first and second trimesters.

During your third trimester your yoga practice should be supervised by a qualified prenatal yoga teacher.

General advice

- Make sure your doctor is aware that you intend to continue your practice of yoga during your pregnancy.
 - Your doctor should advise you of any issues that might make it inadvisable to do prenatal yoga.
- It is important to let your yoga teacher know you are pregnant, and which trimester you are in.
- Ensure you stay hydrated, drinking enough water before and after exercise.
- Listen to your body and only do what feels good.
 - If your body is telling you something feels wrong, don't do it.
- Take it easy – easier than what you normally do.
 - The pregnancy hormone *relaxin* is released in your body during pregnancy to allow the uterus to expand. This has the effect of softening connective tissue in your joints, making it easier to overdo stretches.
 - Hold poses only for as long as is comfortable – don't push yourself.
 - Avoid high energy workouts.
- If you have low blood pressure, or feel faint or dizzy when rising from the floor, limit movements with arms higher than your head and avoid holding your arms above your head.
 - Your blood pressure will be lower during pregnancy as your heart works harder to supply blood to two people.
 - Hold your hands in Namaste (Prayer) instead of over your head for poses such as Warrior 1.
 - You can do movements such as Circle of Joy, where arms sweep above the head while you are seated.



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Which poses should I avoid, and what can I do instead?

- Twists
 - Don't do deep twists such as Revolved Triangle (Parivrtta Trikonasana) or Revolved Side Angle Pose (Parivrtta Parsvakonasana).
 - Do open twists instead
 - Twist away from the raised knee in Seated Spinal Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana).
 - Twist more from the shoulders and back than from the waist and only go as far as feels comfortable.
- Inversions
 - Avoid intense inversions such as Shoulder Stand, Handstand, Headstand
 - As an alternative, try legs against the wall with legs apart and using props adjusted for comfort – but don't hold for too long.
 - Down Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana), though categorized as an inversion, is fine to do for short periods.
- Backbends
 - Most backbends should be avoided. However, there are some that can be done safely
 - Use Bridge (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana) as an alternative to other backbends. Better yet, use blocks for Supported Bridge.
 - You can also Camel (Ustrasana) with support from hands placed on the lower back (see your teacher for instruction).
- Abdominal work
 - Avoid abdominal work from month 2 onwards.
 - Use half plank (hands and knees) instead of plank.
 - Don't do Boat Pose (Navasana) Side Plank (Vasisthasana) or leg lifts.
 - Instead, take a rest in wide-legged child's pose (Balsana) or do some Cat/Cows.
- Supine (laying on your back) poses
 - Don't lay on your back after the first trimester. Instead, use bolsters or blankets to elevate your upper body greater than 20 degrees for reclining poses such as Supta Baddha Konasana, Supta Padangusthasana and Supta Virasana.
 - Lay on your left side in Savasana
 - This will avoid pressure on your vena cava vein.
 - Arrange blankets or bolsters under your right knee, right arm, head and belly (if it is showing) so as to support all parts of your body.
- Seated forward bends:
 - Widen your legs to give your belly more space.
 - A little more bend in your knees can be very helpful.
 - Lift and broaden your chest and fold at the hips.
 - This rule applies to all yoga practice, even when not pregnant. It is particularly helpful when pregnant as it creates more space for the belly.
- Down Dog
 - Avoid holding Down Dog for more than one or two breaths.
 - Child's Pose (Balsana) with knees wide and arms extended is a great alternative.



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- Breathing exercises (Pranayama)
 - Avoid holding the breath.
 - Avoid forceful breathing exercises, such as Kapalabhati and Bhastrika.
 - Alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodana) is a safe practice that can be used as an alternative to other Pranayama.
 - Ujjayi Pranayama should be done under guidance of a qualified prenatal yoga teacher. It can help you prepare for child-birth, but there are conditions where it should not be practiced, such as if the mucus membranes are swollen.
- Balance poses
 - Balance poses should be done near a wall for extra safety in case you lose your balance.
 - Substitute Tree (Vrksasana) for other balance poses such as Dancer (Natarajasana) and Warrior 3 (Virabhadrasana 3).
 - In Tree (Vrksasana), place your foot below your knee instead of above it.
 - Extended Hand to Big Toe Pose (Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana) may be practiced using a bent knee with your hand on your knee instead of using a strap or reaching your toe.

What helps?

- Cat-Cow
 - This stretches your spine, and facilitates the circulation of blood and spinal fluids. It helps to calm your mind and reduce morning sickness.
- Standing poses
(Warrior 1 and 2 (Virabhadrasana 1 and 2), Side Angle Pose (Parsvakonasana), Triangle (Trikonasana), Mountain Pose (Tadasana), Chair Pose (Utkatasana)).
 - These poses will help strengthen the leg muscles, improve circulation, increase energy and can also help reduce leg cramps.
 - Most standing poses are fine, but avoid closed twists such as Revolved Triangle or Revolved Side Angle Pose.
 - Stand near the wall, or with a chair nearby – your balance will be changing, so play it safe with a wall nearby to steady yourself if needed.
 - Use blocks in Triangle and Side Angle Pose to make it easier for your bottom hand to reach the ground.
 - Shorten your stance in the later part of your pregnancy so as to reduce any strain on the pelvic floor.
- Savasana
 - This will help relax your mind and body. It will help restore your energy, helping you to overcome fatigue. It gives relief from pain, nausea, and morning sickness.
 - Lay on your left side and arrange blankets or bolsters under your right knee, right arm, head and belly (if it is showing) so as to support all parts of your body.



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- Child's Pose (Balasana)
 - This pose relaxes the back and the mind. It releases stress in the muscles and improves blood circulation. It also helps battle dizziness, fatigue, and nausea.
 - Ensure your legs are wide to make room for your abdomen and use a bolster, blankets or blocks to support your head.
- Hip openers
 - These poses strengthen and open the pelvis, helping to make child-birth easier.
 - Butterfly (Baddha Konasana)
 - In addition to opening the pelvis, this pose also improves blood circulation and helps calm the mind.
 - Use a blanket or pillow under your buttocks and support your legs/knees with bolsters/blocks/blankets/pillows to avoid overextending your hips.
 - Low squat (Malasana)
 - This strengthens your hips and thighs, helping support the extra weight you are carrying. It also enhances the circulation of blood and ensures a good stretch in your hips and thighs.
 - Use blocks under your sit bones to support you in the later part of your pregnancy.

Remember

Our bodies are all different and each person will go through pregnancy very differently. Some bodies will be fine with a stronger practice throughout the trimesters and others needed to rest and focus on more restorative practice. This handout provides general guidance only. Please get in touch with a prenatal yoga teacher for guidance tuned to your specific needs.

Prenatal Yoga Classes

- Several yoga studios in Brisbane run prenatal yoga classes, including:
 - Inna Bliss
 - 3901 4780
 - info@innablissyoga.com.au
 - <http://www.innablissyoga.com.au/pregnancy-yoga-brisbane/>
 - SoHo Yoga
 - 3180 1686
 - namaste@sohoyoga.com.au
 - <http://www.sohoyoga.com.au/pregnancy-yoga/>
 - Stretch Yoga
 - 3210 6886
 - <https://www.stretchyoga.com.au/prenatal-yoga-course.html>
 - Yoga Baby
 - 0424 755 763
 - <https://www.yogababy.com.au/>



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