

Dear Student,

The following information is provided as a means of introducing you to the benefits of pre- and postnatal yoga, and also offering you some guidelines to be aware of in your practice. At any point, if you have questions that have not been addressed either here or in class, please don't hesitate to ask.

Wishing you a healthy, delightful and peaceful pregnancy, delivery, and "motherhood",

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PRENATAL & POSTNATAL YOGA

BENEFITS – Prenatal & Postnatal Yoga have a multitude of physical, emotional and mental benefits for both you and your baby. A selection of these are listed below.

Pregnancy Support

- Reduces stress and anxiety through awareness and breathing practices
- Provides emotional support through contact with other pregnant women
- Increases blood and lymph circulation, thereby supporting the physiological processes of pregnancy
- Relieves musculoskeletal tension and pain through strengthening and lengthening muscles and aligning the skeleton
- Strengthens the body, thereby decreasing stress on weight-bearing joints & supporting comfortable postural changes
- Enhances kinesthetic awareness, further allowing for comfortable pregnancy-related structural changes

Labor Support

- Labor support techniques include
 - breathing/relaxation practices
 - muscle control/education
 - deepened kinesthetic awareness and relaxation

Each of these techniques contributes to your ability to allow you body work most effectively in labor:

- Breathing and relaxation techniques** can support you through intense or difficult sensations and emotions.
- Kinesthetic awareness** can help you find beneficial laboring positions and release tension that arises in response to pain (these support effective dilation and effacement, proper pushing, and prevent whole-body soreness post-labor).
- Muscular control and awareness** can help you isolate and use your muscles in the most effective ways (this might include moving the hips in circles to bring the baby lower into the birth canal, knowing how to release and open your inner thighs and pelvic floor muscles to allow the baby to move through the pelvis, and knowing how to effectively use the abdominal muscles while pushing.)

In the event of cesarean sections (planned or unplanned), the same tools will benefit you in added ways:

- Breathing and relaxation** practices will help calm you during early contractions or while being prepped for surgery.
- Muscle control and kinesthetic awareness** will support early labor AND help substantially in post-surgery healing.

Postpartum Support

- Decrease in postpartum soreness, and faster recovery due to strong and flexible muscles and effective laboring
- Easier postpartum restoration of abdominal and pelvic muscles as well as postural alignment
- Kinesthetic awareness further supports healthy postpartum structural changes
- Muscle strengthening and lengthening helps prevent discomfort stemming from poor alignment as well as the repetitive strain injuries often caused by nursing, lifting and carrying infants

Postpartum Support Cont.

- Promotes functional healing of tissues affected by cesarean incision
- Class community provides support and recognition of the physical/emotional realities of caring for an infant

THINGS TO BE AWARE OF & CAUTIONS

While the benefits of pre- and postnatal yoga are often profound, it is important throughout your practice, to remember that your body is undergoing huge changes, and that it needs your strong and attentive support. With this in mind, following is a list of guidelines to adhere to while you practice.

- 1. It is of utmost importance not to push yourself too hard in class.** At other times in life, you might be able to get away with this (though it is never a great idea). During pregnancy and immediately after, pushing past your limits puts both you and your baby at risk of injury or illness. The time you spend learning to really listen to your body will benefit you during all parts of your pregnancy, during your labor, and through the rest of your life.
- 2. It is important not to overexert or overheat your body while you are pregnant.** Overexerting may limit the oxygen the baby has access to, or put you at risk for falling or fainting. Overheating can be dangerous to the baby's health. **As a rule of thumb, you should always be able to carry on a conversation while you exercise (not be gasping for air), and you should never be sweating profusely or experiencing a marked increase in body heat/sweating.**
- 3. If you are tired, take a moment or two to rest. Dizziness, nausea or lightheadedness are all signs that you need to rest.**
- 4. If you find that you need to snack frequently to keep your blood sugar at comfortable levels, bring snacks with you to class, and eat small amounts as needed. Similarly, be sure to stay hydrated; a bottle of water beside your mat is just fine in prenatal or mom & baby classes.**
- 5. Because of the ligament laxity (loosening of ligaments due to the hormone relaxin) that takes place in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy, it is important not to over stretch your joints. Ligaments hold your joints together. When, as in pregnancy, they are loose, the joints are at risk for injury. The focus in prenatal classes is primarily on strengthening the muscles to support the joints; lengthening them must be done in a supported and non-aggressive manner. Never "sag" your body into deep poses or force your joints into uncomfortable or extreme positions. This applies for at least 6 months after delivery, as well.**
- 6. It is important to keep your abdominal muscles strong for back support and effective pushing in the second (pushing) stage of labor. However, as the uterus expands and stretches the abdominal muscles, it is also easy to strain or separate them (diastasis recti) Abdominal exercises must be done in particular positions and with awareness. Lying on your back (ex. "crunches") to strengthen the abdomen is never recommended during pregnancy. From a reclining position on the back, never lift directly to a sitting position. Instead, always turn onto your side first, and then push yourself up with your arms. The same is true in lowering yourself to a reclining position. Safe and effective abdominal exercises will be taught in class.**
- 7. Remember that your balance will continually be challenged as your structure and center of gravity changes during pregnancy and while your body returns to its "normal" state after your baby's birth. Never try balancing poses without the support of a wall or chair on which you can catch your balance.**
- 8. Never compress your uterus and baby against a separate surface or part of your body.** To avoid this in many poses, one can simply reposition the thighs, bringing them to the outside of the belly, rather than directly in front of it. Twists should be performed gently in all positions, and never in a closed (toward a bent leg) position.
- 9. If you have questions about the appropriateness of a particular pose, always ask.**
- 10. Finally, if you simply feel that something is not right for you or your baby, it is best to respect that feeling. You do not need to have any explainable or logical reason--trust yourself and trust your body. This, above all else, is what will support you through pregnancy, labor and mothering.**