

### **Waiting to join the yoga class? Want to do something for yourself in the meantime?**

The first trimester of pregnancy (up to 13-14 weeks) is a huge period of adjustment on all levels: in body, mind and emotions. Whilst your body is adjusting to pregnancy it is not advisable to do strong yoga postures, so even if you are used to yoga do soften your practice. Quite often fatigue and nausea protect us anyway from wishing to over-exert during this period of adjustment so that our energy can go towards nourishing and nurturing the baby inside.

As well as all the physiological changes in your body, you may be experiencing some of the following common thoughts and emotions: shock, anxiety, fear over the impending changes to your life and body, even anger at the pregnancy. You may be experiencing a conflict of emotions – such as joy as well as fear. Everyone responds differently so all these and others are normal reactions. And because your pregnancy is probably not known to many others nor yet visible then you may feel very isolated – see end of sheet for some advice on this.

**So how can yoga help you right now?** A gentle and regular yoga practice early in your pregnancy can help you to adjust to your pregnancy so you become calmer and more accepting of the changes, to focus on the present moment rather than looking too far ahead, to lay the foundations for breathing (pranayama) and good posture (alignment). Yoga can also help you to connect to the growing life within you.

**Here are some gentle practices – always make sure your body is fully supported by the floor and use extra cushions to make you comfortable.**

**Deep abdominal breathing** This can be done sitting or lying down comfortably, with your hands gently on your belly if you wish. Become aware of the natural breath in your belly, expanding as you breathe in, softening as you breathe out. Let your hands feel this movement and rhythm. Feel and visualise the inhalation as bathing your whole belly and abdominal organs with healing energy, and the exhalation as relaxing them deeper and deeper. Let go of any tension you may be holding inside as you breathe out. Sense too that the in-breath is also going directly to the growing life inside you and the surrounding space of your body. Stay with this practice for a few minutes, letting the wave of your breath settle into an effortless rhythm.

**Setting the foundations of good posture** Now is a great opportunity to notice how you sit, walk, stand, lie down and move from one position to another, so that you are aware of how to optimise your posture as your baby grows. Visualise a rectangle from one shoulder to the other, and from one hip to the other with space down the sides of the body:



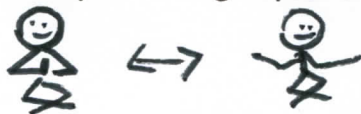
Be aware of the natural length of the spine, feeling connected to the ground through your feet if you are standing, your pelvis if you are sitting and the back of your body if you are

lying on your back. As your baby grows you may need to bend your knees so your lower back is comfortable and then lie on your side when your body tells you to (at least by 30 weeks if not before).

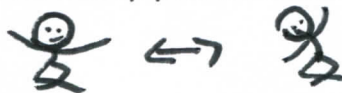


**Chest and heart opening practices** These simple practices help to stretch the muscles involved in breathing and to bring a feeling of peace and joy. Let compassion for yourself flow into your heart so you feel deeply nurtured just as your body is nurturing your baby. These practices can be done standing with soft knees or in a supported sitting position.

- a) Sit comfortably with hands in prayer position on breastbone, breathe in to open arms to sides expanding the ribcage, breathe out to return to centre. Keep shoulders and arms relaxed and carry on as long as your breathing rhythm is comfortable.



- b) Side stretch: breathe in to open arms to shoulder level, breathe out to go into side stretch with one arm up and the other arm down. Breathe in to return to centre then breathe out to other side. Keep your neck relaxed. Repeat whilst comfortable.



- c) Gently bring arms around to back and interlock elbows. Feel the front of the body lengthening and welcome easy breath into ribcage. Keep back of neck long with chin a little tucked in. Release after a few breaths.



- d) Cross arms in front of body holding on to opposite shoulder. Relax the shoulders and drop the chin a little. Feel the space of the back of the lungs opening out.



**Relaxation** Most of your energy at the moment is going towards your baby so many women feel very tired, sometimes exhausted. Give yourself regular time for rest and relaxation, knowing your energies will return when this phase is complete.

**Still feeling isolated?** Birth and Baby Reality run a free class from 10 weeks gestation giving you an opportunity to meet other parents-to-be and to learn more about pregnancy. Birth and Baby Reality also run on-going antenatal classes for later in your pregnancy as well as continued support including coffee mornings once you have had your baby. Go to [www.birthandbabyreality.co.uk](http://www.birthandbabyreality.co.uk) or call 01926 731621.

**Belinda Staplehurst**

**Birthlight pre and postnatal yoga teacher**

[www.yogaworks.me.uk](http://www.yogaworks.me.uk)

tel 07981 769920