

Yoga for Childbirth

Your guide for adapting your *Yoga for the Vagina* practice to nurture and support your body in growing your baby.

IMPORTANT... PLEASE READ THIS FIRST!

While *Yoga for the Vagina*, when adapted for pregnancy as prescribed below, will in most cases support and nurture your pregnancy and help prepare your body for an easeful birth, it is important to consult with your GP first so you are aware of any risks that may be involved for you personally. Every body is different and so is every pregnancy.

In using *Yoga for the Vagina* during your pregnancy, you understand that yoga requires physical exertion that may be strenuous and may cause physical injury. In using this program, you agree to assume full responsibility for any risks, injuries or damages, known or unknown, which you might incur as a result of participating in *Yoga for the Vagina* while pregnant.

If you do decide to use *Yoga for the Vagina* while pregnant, please read this guide carefully and revisit it often throughout your pregnancy so you can ensure you're modifying the poses as required as your belly grows, and that you're carrying out the sequences in a way that's holistically nurturing to both yourself and your baby. Take this information and make choices for yourself. Enjoy!

YOGA: YOUR BEST BIRTH PREP

Yoga is one of the best preparations for the challenges of childbirth; because it strengthens you physically as much as mentally. It opens the door to your inner voice so you can rely on your own inner strength and wisdom as the birth day unfolds. It gives you a practice that teaches you mindfulness and body awareness, so you can become intimately connected with the sensations in your body.

Sensations are your biggest cues. They let you know what feels good, and what feels uncomfortable. Yoga gives you an opportunity to work with the mind's resistance to unpleasant or intense sensations in the body so you can practice using the breath to move through them. You become more able to observe how discomfort changes moment by moment, which is not at all unlike the contractions you will experience as part of giving birth.

In yoga you get to practice not trying to be anywhere, but here in the present moment. And that practice in itself will serve you well during your birth. Having yoga poses up your sleeve also gives you the ability to move your body and adapt to the changing conditions of the labor process. If there's one thing you want to be doing during your labor, it's moving your body in ways that help support your baby in traveling down your birth canal.

Of course, the *style* of yoga you do while pregnant plays a crucial role in either hindering or helping prepare your body for childbirth. You see, not all styles of yoga are the same. If we travel back in history to the origins of yoga, yoga was actually developed for men, and women weren't even allowed to do it. Hence to say, most yoga modalities teach a style of yoga that's often too harsh on the female body, and can actually lead to tension in the pelvic floor and reproductive area.

Yes, it might sound like you're superwoman if you have a pelvic floor of steel, but try birthing a baby through your over-toned pelvic floor, and you'll soon run into trouble. In order for a woman to have a

natural vaginal birth without tearing or later complications, she needs to be doing yoga that is well-suited to her gorgeous womanly figure and supports her in creating:

- ♥ A supple pelvic floor (one that is toned but free of tension due to over-strengthening)
- ♥ Pelvic stability and flexibility
- ♥ A healthy posture that encourages the baby to position correctly and supports the sexual organs in staying in place
- ♥ The ability to completely relax and surrender her whole pelvic area (and vagina) open
- ♥ Trust in her inner voice to guide her through the birthing process.

And... if you're after an *orgasmic birth* - yes, they certainly are possible - then you also want to add 'sentient vaginal tissue' to the list. Unfortunately, if you've been doing Kegels everyday or a rigorous pilates or yoga routine that is designed solely to strengthen your pelvic floor and encourages you to iron out the natural womanly curve in your lower back, then you compromise your body's innate ability to birth.

Use your practice to create space in the body, and to nurture you as you come into your motherhood.

So you can start to see how *Yoga for the Vagina* really is one of the best yoga practices you can have when it comes to experiencing a healthy pregnancy, easeful birth and resilient reproductive system as you head into your twilight years. As you know, *Yoga for the Vagina* was developed specifically to support the female body in being able to function as it was designed, without outside substances or interventions.

Poor posture, unhealthy exercise regimes, sedentary lifestyles, lack of empowering education and a disconnection from the body are all responsible for the high rate of interventions required in childbirth, and the even higher rate of long-term symptoms experienced post-birth. More than 60 percent of women will experience incontinence post-birth. 44% of women will experience some form of sexual organ prolapse. The stats really are shocking, yet these kinds of issues can be prevented with a self-love based yoga practice that is purposely built around the female body and reproductive system.

YOGA FOR A HEALTHY PREGNANCY AND ECSTATIC BIRTH

When you combine postures that help lubricate the hips, groin and belly - all places that become tight from sitting too much - you begin to clear the stuck energy creating illness in the body, so that such issues as infertility, ovarian cysts, weak or over-tight pelvic floors, PMS and other womanly problems, are able to self-heal. In order to get pregnant, you need to have a healthy reproductive system, and *Yoga for the Vagina* does this, through aiding the body in working as it was designed.

At the same time, the practice helps create a supple pelvic floor and a highly sentient vagina, so that you can experience deep vaginal pleasure, not only during sex, but during birth. When your vagina is awake - you'll know if your vagina is awake because you'll be experiencing G-spot orgasms and full body cervical orgasms - then orgasmic birth becomes a real possibility for you, as the baby makes its way down through the birth canal.

Not only that, having such a lush and restorative practice where the focus is on body-love and self-nurture, you develop a much deeper connection to your inner voice, that will guide you through the entire labour. This ability to stay in your body and listen to your body's cues - your sensations - is one of the most important ingredients to a happy, healthy, positive birth. And if you want to read more about this, I recommend the book *Mindful Birthing* by Nancy Bardacke.

What about post-birth? When a woman gives birth she can experience all sorts of complications and long-term symptoms, especially when there are interventions during the birthing process. The most common of these being incontinence, damaged nerve endings, loss of libido, post-natal depression and prolapsed sexual organs (where your sexual organs quite literally fall out of place, sometimes right on out through your vagina!)

As you learn how to gently squeeze and release, in a way that activates your entire pelvic parafit of muscles, tissues, fascia and organs, you create the perfect amount of supple tone to restore any loss of vaginal elasticity, support your sexual organs in returning to their healthy and natural positioning, so that any of the symptoms you experienced post-birth, can heal. Not only that, as you do this beautiful practice, you will feel more connected to yourself so that your sense of self returns, along with your libido!

Many women feel as though their vagina simply isn't the same after childbirth, and while it may not return to it's pre-birth look and feel, you can certainly use this practice to help it reawaken and re-tone so that it's super healthy and you're experiencing even deeper pleasure than *before* your birth. Something to consider, is that it's not so much that birth changes the vagina. The vagina is a muscle. You either use it or lose it. The more you can prepare the vagina and those internal muscles *before* birth, the easier and quicker you can bring them back *after* birth.

LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING SHALL WE? CONCEPTION.

I'll begin by saying that all of the *Yoga for the Vagina* sequences are 100% safe and actually beneficial in helping you conceive, as the postures help direct healing energy to your sexual organs, while the Jade Egg brings fresh blood to your vagina and surrounding tissues; all helping to prepare the area for conception by ensuring your tissues and organs are in optimum health. I was using *Yoga for the Vagina* daily when I conceived my baby.

I only have one small adjustment that I would recommend to your practice while conceiving. During the fertile phase of your cycle - this will be when your mucus changes to fertile mucus ahead of ovulation - if you're following the Billings Ovulation Method you will know when this time is (see the 'Extra Resources' area for further information on this method) - I would suggest doing your practices without the Jade Egg, or simply doing the Moontime and Mini sequences.

The reason for this, is that the sperm can hide out in the pockets of shaw awaiting the release of your egg, and you just don't want the Jade Egg interfering with this process. In most cases it won't (using the egg wouldn't be any different to having sex after you've slept together with the intention of conceiving), however, if you want to be super sure, I'd suggest not using the Jade Egg during those fertile days. Once you've ovulated and counted three days, as taught in the Billings Ovulation Method, then go back to using your Jade Egg and wait to see if the conception has occurred.

USING THE JADE EGG ONCE PREGNANT

Whether you continue to use the Jade Egg while pregnant or instead decide to do the sequences *without* the Jade Egg, depends on three things. Firstly, if you haven't been using the Jade Egg regularly for at least six months before conceiving, then I do NOT recommend using the Jade Egg while pregnant. While the Jade Egg is gentle in its approach, it is working to change the shape and structure of the pelvic floor, which you don't want to be doing while pregnant.

It's for this reason that it's generally advised that you don't begin *any* new physical activity while pregnant, as your body is already undergoing profound change, and may not be able to cope with the

unnecessary strain of moving your body in a new and unfamiliar way. The uterus is busy baby-making and using the Jade Egg does exercise the uterus. You don't want to overload the uterus or you could compromise its other more important task, of facilitating the growth of baby.

That said, if you *have* been using the Jade Egg for at least six months prior to conception, your uterus will be familiar with being gently exercised in this way, and will be well equipped to use the Jade Egg *and* grow your baby simultaneously. Of course, seeking the approval of your doctor first is always recommended, as you may be considered a high risk pregnancy for one reason or another, and therefore may need to stop using the Jade Egg.

Ok, so your doctor has said you're ok to keep using the Jade Egg, you've been using it for at least six months, then you're fine to keep using the Jade Egg through pregnancy, right? Not necessarily. The final thing you need to listen to, is your body. Your body will tell you if it wants to use the Jade Egg during pregnancy or not. For many women, they will experience their practice as usual. For other women, their vagina will spit the egg back out.

This is what happened to me. Within a month of becoming pregnant, every time I tried to use the Jade Egg, I had trouble sipping it in (which wasn't something I'd experienced since first learning how to Sip years earlier) and once inside, it would spit itself back out within ten minutes of my practice. Again, something I had not experienced before conception. Essentially my body was communicating to me that it was busy making baby, and simply didn't want me using the Jade Egg at the same time.

I did try using the Jade Egg a few more times over the course of the pregnancy, only for the egg to come straight back out again. I also found, that I wasn't actually drawn to use the egg like I had been prior to conception. So I honoured my body and stopped using my Jade Egg for the rest of my pregnancy, while still doing the *Yoga for the Vagina* sequences and still doing the gentle squeezes and releases, minus the Jade Egg.

Your body is wiser than you know. Listen to it.

Now just because that was *my* experience, doesn't mean your body will react the same way. What you need to understand is that every body's body is unique and has different requirements during pregnancy. Many women travel through pregnancy using their Jade Egg and have a beautiful birth. Whatever you do, don't feel guilty for not using the Jade Egg, if that's what your body is asking of you. Your body knows better than your mind!

What matters, is not if you use the Jade Egg or not, but that you honour what your body needs. If your body has decided it doesn't want the egg inside, keep doing the gentle squeezes and releases during your practice, letting them be soft and nurturing. If you've been using a Jade Egg for a while now, you will have built strong neural connections, that will see these gentle squeezes activating your body as usual, even without the egg inside.

If on the other hand you body **LOVES** the Jade Egg while pregnant, then continue on as usual. Using the Jade Egg can be a really healthy and beautiful way to stay connected to your lady parts as they change and adapt. As you know, using a Jade Egg internally is an extremely soft and gentle practice; much softer than the way many women have sex! Yet we are not advised against having sex while pregnant. The important thing to remember when using the Jade Egg, having sex or simply going about your day, is to listen to your body.

I can't say that enough. Rest when your body needs rest. Move when your body wants you to move. Make love when your body calls for that connection. Your body is highly intelligent and will tell you

exactly what it needs, from company to food, to physical exercise and spiritual nourishment. Listen intently, follow what your body asks of you, and you will give yourself the best chance of enjoying a beautiful pregnancy and easeful birth.

YOUR PREGNANCY YOGA PRACTICE

Often people come to yoga to increase their flexibility or strength, to get energy moving more freely in the body or even to enjoy deeper relaxation. While these are all beautiful side-effects of a regular yoga practice, the real goal of yoga, especially during pregnancy, is to bring you closer to your True Self. To give you an opportunity to really connect with your inner voice, and listen to it as you would a wise mentor. For that really is one of the key preparations for labour itself.

So with that said, it needs to be understood that it is not during pregnancy that you will radically transform your body. Ideally you want to have done that groundwork before you conceived. You want to have helped your body into its healthiest state pre-pregnancy. What you're doing *during* pregnancy, is using yoga to nurture your changing body, create the space to connect with your True Self, and help manage some of the less pleasant symptoms that can often accompany the pregnancy body.

If you're engaging in other more physically exerting styles of yoga, perhaps ease off on them a little, and let *Yoga for the Vagina* be your pregnancy style, as it is soft, yet deeply healing and most poses (with a few adaptations) are ideal for pregnancy. Your body needs all its energy to build your baby, so allowing it the space to rest, as much as possible, will support your body in doing what it innately wishes to do; grow new life. Don't feel guilty for softening your practice during this time. Simply listen to what your body needs.

Pregnancy yoga is much gentler than your typical yoga class and often the sessions are a little shorter. So don't be surprised if you feel drawn to only practice the Layer 1 sequences, given their gentler approach. You may find that 30-minutes is all your body wants at particular times during your pregnancy; honour that. What matters, is that your yoga sequence of choice is supportive and nurturing.

***Yoga for the Vagina* will nourish you so you have the love and energy to nourish your little one.**

You may find that you are drawn to continue the sequence you were currently up to and simply adapt the poses to suit pregnancy (as listed in the *Posture Guide* below). Or perhaps you advance to Layer 4 and let your body guide you through the poses that you feel your body needs most during this time of constant transformation. Your body will tell what it's craving, and listening to your body is the best gift you can give yourself, as it will not only support you during pregnancy, it will help you develop the inner listening required for the actual birth.

Fatigue during pregnancy is super common. So while you absolutely do want to create more time for your body to rest, you don't want to allow the fatigue and low energy levels to pull you away from your yoga practice. *Yoga for the Vagina* is designed to support the female body through its many life transitions and will help you receive the love and energy you require during this time. If on any given day you just can't bring yourself to do a full sequence, do a Mini. Maintain that connection to self as this is a crucial part of preparing for your birth.

You may want to escape your body because you feel so awful (nausea will do that!), yet this only perpetuates the symptoms. Let your yoga practice be the place where you sit with your symptoms, and listen to what your body is truly needing at this beautiful time in your life. There are plenty of

meditation-style Minis in the series that are perfect for this, if moving through physical poses becomes too much of a chore.

Yoga for the Vagina will not only help open your hips, lubricate your joints and settle the mind during this time of transition. Through maintaining a daily practice you will develop the crucial mind/body connection and self-love needed to glide through your birth in a heart-felt way that will allow for a beautiful entry of your baby into the world. We really can use the symptoms during pregnancy to prepare us both mentally and physically for the intensity of childbirth.

More so than ever you want to do the postures slowly and deliberately, paying careful attention to the sensations in your body as they change moment by moment. When the mind wanders, notice where it's gone and gently invite it back to the sensations in the body or the breath. Realise also that your pregnancy yoga practice extends *beyond* the mat. What we learn on the mat, is designed to strengthen us in all we do *off* the mat.

So just as you take a mindful approach to your actual yoga practice, do the same in your everyday movement. As your belly grows, your body becomes more elastic and your balance is compromised. Bring more awareness into such tasks at getting up from bed in the morning or getting in and out of the car. You need to be careful that you don't cause injury or muscle stresses to your changing body, and mindful awareness is a simple way to prevent this.

Slowing down your practice allows your time on the mat to be a conversation you have with your body.

Moving super slow (both on and off the mat) helps your body to adjust to everything as you move. So as you're making a transition you can align your bones and let all of the tissue support that alignment. As you're stretching you can really feel into every little fibre that is opening. By taking time to learn how to slow everything down, it will positively affect other practices you have. Focus on growing more fluid, more elegant and more graceful.

This kind of practice will start to build an inner capacity for dealing with whatever it is you have going on as you move into parenthood. In this way, yoga really is your birth prep. There is nothing more grounding and centring than being able to deeply connect with your mind, your body and your soul, and allow that connection to guide you through the more challenging moments of life (be it a pose or a contraction or handling a 2-year-old's tantrum).

Move slow, listen to your body, let yoga nurture you, and finally, focus on relaxing your jaw and throat. As you may have read in the *Luscious Lady Parts 60 playsheet*, what happens in your mouth and jaw gets mirrored at your cervix and vagina. Open mouth = Open cervix. Practising releasing your jaw, throat and tongue as I encourage you in many of the guided audios, will start to build the neural pathways that will help the muscles that support your cervix, birth canal, perineum and entire pelvic floor to naturally relax open during your birth.

Tension in throat and jaw will mirror your tension in your pelvis. You need to have a relaxed pelvis to easily give birth.

When often happens for most women during childbirth, is that they start gritting their teeth and clenching their jaw, which is understandable as a response to tension. The problem is, as a woman does this, she effectively squeezes down the gateway to vaginal birth. The more time you spend practising

Yoga for the Vagina, especially the *Letting Go* sequences and the *Sea of Love Mini*, the more you will start to understand, and thus undo, the tension patterns in your system.

Surrendering, letting go and trusting your body - all practised in *Yoga for the Vagina* - are instrumental in childbirth. Your body knows what to do to birth a baby. It has this magnificent intelligence that is far beyond our mental knowing. Let your *Yoga for the Vagina* practice help foster this body intelligence so that when it comes time to meet your little person, you feel comfortable in handing your birth over to your innately wise body.

Know also, that what got the baby in, will help get the baby out! Yes, *pleasure* is your best friend during labour because it helps produce the hormones in the body that help dull painful sensations. Pleasure also speeds up the labour process and hey, who doesn't want to be experiencing pleasure during birth! Hence to say, seeking out the pleasure in each posture and enjoying exploring the *Pure Pleasure* sequences will all help build those pleasure pathways that will serve you during the birthing process.

Finally, yoga and meditation gives you a time and place to reflect on the constant transformation, and thus help you balance your mental and emotional state, which you want, as how you *feel* during your pregnancy will play a huge role on how safe and happy your child feels once it's born. Having a practice that allows you to release stored up tension and stress, while at the same time helping you build self-love, is a crucial part of developing a healthy state of mind for your child.

From conception the unborn child's subconscious programming begins to form, based purely on the feelings, emotions and experiences you're having while pregnant. This is how we, as women, have a great effect upon the psych of the child we are carrying inside of us. While we don't need to tell our bodies to physically make the child within us, we are very much the co-creator in the development of our child's sense of self.

ADAPTING THE POSES

While the poses in *Yoga for the Vagina* are very compatible with pregnancy, there are still a few changes you need to make as you'll see in the *Posture Guide* which offers modifications, options and advice on when a pose is no longer safe to practice. However, any advice I give in this guide, should come second to your innate feminine wisdom. ALWAYS listen to your body above anything else. It will let you know what poses will support your growing child and which poses are not right on any given day.

I encourage anyone doing these practices to avoid sharp movements and instead move softly and gracefully in and out of each posture, but this is even more important during pregnancy, when you want to nurture, soften and connect. The body is going through massive transformation and needs time to rest and relax so it can integrate the changes happening. By slowing down you're creating the space to receive feedback from your body as it communicates to you.

When moving from a sitting position to a standing position, take even more time than you usually would to get up so you don't end up with a head spin. Be super conscious about how you're moving because your balance can be off as you gain baby weight. It's also a great idea to shake out your hands and legs after each pose, especially if you're exploring a sequence where you stay in the same position for consecutive poses.

Let the yummy sequences nurture you through this beautiful rite of passage.

This time marks a new chapter with your baby coming into your life. Use this time during pregnancy to get to know what poses your body needs most. Rest is super important during pregnancy, so if you

begin a practice and you are drawn to simply lie on a bolster in a supported **Child's Pose** or come into your side-body **Sleeping Beauty pose**, trust that you're giving your body exactly what it needs at this time. Go into each practice with no expectations, and allow the practice to be what it needs to be for you on that particular day; replenishing.

My personal favourite sequences for pregnancy are the *Moontime* and *Pure Pleasure* sequences as they are the easiest to modify for pregnancy and include many of the super helpful poses that prepare the body for birth. You may find during your pregnancy that you wish to continue listening to the guided sequences, making the appropriate adjustments as you go, or you may find you put together your own personal sequence using the recommendations in the guide (as you would in Layer 4).

THINGS TO BE WARY OF..

During pregnancy your body is constantly adapting to the requirements of your baby. First trimester is known for fatigue and morning sickness - although some women do not experience this, it is extremely common and normal - as is back pain and other musculoskeletal problems. I myself experienced right lower back pain, despite never having experienced back pain before, that I needed to manage throughout my pregnancy, and adjust my practice to suit.

Why are body complaints so common? Because if we tried to birth a baby out of the solid structure we have pre-pregnancy, it just wouldn't be possible. The joints in the pelvis and sacrum need to be able to move in ways that go well beyond normal everyday functioning. The body needs to have a little 'give'. As pregnancy progresses, all the ligaments in the body begin to soften and loosen as the hormone relaxin is released, preparing the body for birth.

Relaxin, a hormone released at ten times its normal concentration during pregnancy, is softening ligaments and joints in your pelvis, preparing for the expansion that occurs when your baby passes through it. While this is wonderful for the pelvis, relaxin also softens the joints and ligaments throughout the entire body, making you particularly susceptible to over-stretching.

Ligaments serve a very important function. They protect the joints from moving out of their healthy range of motion. The problem is, as our elasticity grows, it's easy to push our body beyond where is safe (both inside and outside of our yoga practice), putting pressure and strain on our vulnerable joints. What results, is aches and pains that we may have never experienced pre-pregnancy, or the flare up of old injuries.

For this reason it's extremely important while pregnant that you do not try to increase your flexibility. Yes, explore your edge during a pose, but don't over-stretch. This is not the time to learn to do the splits! The most important thing is to recognise that this time in your life is for growing a baby, not increasing your flexibility, and the best thing you can do as you experience this greater range of movement, is listen to your body's cues intensely throughout your practice.

Let each posture tell you how long to hold it for, how slow to go, how far to stretch.

If you're ever unsure on whether to expend more energy or less, err on the side of caution. Show your body kindness and compassion. If you come across a pose you're unable to do, either adapt it, choose a new pose, or imagine doing it in your mind's eye (you will still gain benefits from imagining yourself doing the pose). You want to keep a nice balance between active engagement and flexibility in each pose.

Please note: If you find during a sequence that your abdomen becomes hard (perhaps tight and stretched up) gently stop the pose you're currently doing and rest until your abdomen softens again.

POSTURE GUIDE

The first trimester of pregnancy is perhaps the most fragile time, as the foetus is trying to implant. For this reason, as soon as you know you're pregnant, you want to pay more attention to how you feel in each pose than you usually would and simply ensure you're moving in a gentle way that makes you feel good. Avoid any pose that doesn't feel good and trust your inner voice above any guidance I give you below in the pose modifications.

Poses that are **great** throughout pregnancy include:

Movements and poses that help free up the pelvis, open your hips and help create fluidity in the pelvic area are brilliant at helping you relax and soften your entire pelvic region to facilitate a more easeful birth. These types of poses include **Sufi Grinds**, **Butterfly**, **Squats**, **Sacrum Grinds**, **Pelvic Thrusts**, **Hip Swivels**, **Figure 8s**, the **Pelvic Shimmy**, **Hip Dips**, **Lunges** and **Freestyle Dance**. We're unpacking all the resistance in the pelvic region through these kinds of moving poses. Softness and pliability in the pelvic region is super important for birthing your baby.

Easy Pose, **Life Nerve Stretch**, **Pussy Cat**, **Spinal Flex**, as well as relaxation and conscious breathing are also beautiful poses for pregnancy. **Pussy Cat** is brilliant in that it naturally engages the pelvic floor, can be really nice to have a little play in (for example, you may like to come onto all fours and wag your tail which is lovely for ironing out lower back pain and keeping the sacrum and pelvic region mobile), and also helps baby position in the third trimester. Not to mention it's a beautiful birth position pose.

Sufi Grinds are an active birth practice. When you do **Sufi Grinds** you're laying foundations firmly into the principle of rhythmic movement. All of the present day birthing gurus will tell you that it's a woman's capacity to intimately engage with rhythmic movement that entirely enhances her capacity to engage with the intensity of childbirth. If you find it uncomfortable sitting directly on the floor for your **Sufi Grinds**, prop yourself up with a cushion or bolster.

Butterfly is a really nice pose for pregnant women because the legs are abducted, providing space for the belly. This pose relaxes and stretches the hips, legs and thighs, while strengthening the pelvic floor. It also helps to prepare the pelvic floor for birth by bringing greater flexibility and circulation to the area. Keeping your back straight during the exercise will help strengthen your back muscles to support the extra weight of baby. Do this stretch anytime you feel nervous or tight and it'll help you relax.

While pregnancy yoga has a softness to it and a far slower pace, you still want to play with some stronger poses specifically designed to help build your mental and physical strength, without drawing energy away from your growing baby. The intensity of birth has often been likened to that of running a marathon, so in this way you want to prepare for birth physically.

Challenging arm exercises, that don't overuse the abdomen help build the nervous system are perfect examples of healthy stronger poses, as they strengthen the aura and prepare you to focus during the intensity of birth by building your mental and physical strength. I have included some of these, called **Arm Strengtheners** at the end of the *Posture Guide*. Feel free to use these alone or substitute them into any sequence where a pose doesn't feel good to you, or you have been advised not to do.

Poses to **avoid** during pregnancy:

Right from the beginning of pregnancy the poses you need to avoid are the **Fertility Massage**, as you want to let your body do its job without any external interference, the **Rock Pose** modification that is used in the *Moontime Mini*, **Breath of Fire** (as this is too dynamic), holding your breath in or out while in or outside of a pose, and anything else that just doesn't feel good for you.

Be mindful when doing twists such as **Spinal Twist** and **Side-Body Twist**, not to work your twists too deeply. Same goes for back-bends. Enter them gently and avoid going into them too deeply, so you don't cause constriction in the body, especially during the first trimester. The baby is implanting in the uterus walls and you don't want to interfere with that process. In the last trimester you want to be careful not to go too far into back-bends, because you can over-stretch the skin on your stomach. Focus more on opening your *chest*.

Poses such as the **Plank**, that strongly work the abdominals, should also be avoided, or only held for very short amounts of time. These poses put too much pressure on the area of the body that is busy creating life. It's best during pregnancy to leave that area to work its magic! You'll have plenty of time from at least 3-months after baby arrives to focus on your abs, if this is something that's important to you.

But while we're talking about the abs, it's important to highlight that the abdominal area is more than just the front six-pack most of us think of when referring to our abs. The abdominals are a group of muscles that run all the way to the back-body. So we're not looking to tone the rectus abdominis during pregnancy (the front six-pack). What you do want to keep strong however, is the transverse abdominis, which we're already doing in yoga.

Any time you're in a pose and you lift the sides of your waist or you lift your back ribs, that's not only creating space for the lower back, but strengthening the transverse abdominis, which is a sheath of muscle that runs all the way to the back-body. So you can certainly rest assured that even if you leave out these strong abdominal poses, your abdominals are still being worked, just in a way that is healthy for baby.

As your belly begins to grow you want to avoid any poses such as **Cobra** or **Sphinx** that involve lying on your belly. You also want to avoid lying on your back for more than a couple of minutes beyond the 6th month (or when it begins to feel uncomfortable) as the weight of your growing belly will start to compress the vena cava vein, which interferes with circulation. The best position for increased blood flow to the baby is lying on the left side.

School's out when it comes to inversions. Some yoga schools promote inversions, while others say any pose that puts your head below your heart should be avoided, especially during the first trimester if you have a history of miscarriage and also during the third trimester when you want to be moving in a way that helps support your baby in positioning. Listen to your body. If it doesn't feel good, don't do it. If on the other hand you're the Queen of inversions, enter them gently, making sure you have good balance and spend shorter amounts of time in them.

Child's Pose and **Extended Child's Pose** are mild inversions, and while generally safe for early pregnancy, simply add a bolster as your pregnancy progresses. And of course it goes without saying, that you also want to avoid any pose that aggravates existing weaknesses or injuries. Your body is extremely elastic and carrying a larger load than usual, so you want to be super nurturing and super gentle with your body at this beautiful time.

Just a quick note on balancing poses such as **Tree Pose** and **Ballerina**; because your balance is likely to be a little off as your baby belly grows, I would suggest having a chair or wall nearby that you can hold for support. Your rapidly changing body will knock even the most centred yogi off balanced at certain

times during your pregnancy, and this is to be embraced not frowned upon, but accepting outside support to ensure you don't fall.

How to modify the poses that will need to be adapted as your pregnancy develops:

Below is a list of the postures that will need to be modified as your pregnancy develops, with explanations and some diagrams on how to make those modifications. Also consider using props, if you're not already. Props are super helpful during pregnancy. A bolster, a cushion, blanket and some blocks are perfect to help support you.

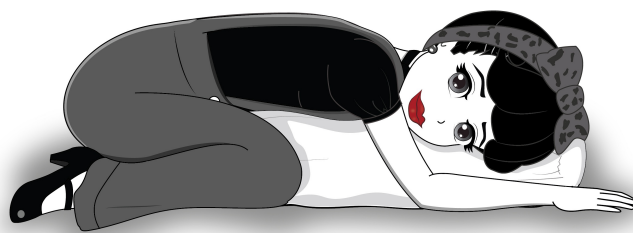
Base Position: **Base Position** will generally be fine until the third trimester or when you feel your belly is becoming too heavy for you to comfortably lie on your back. You may also find, like I did from week 6 of my pregnancy, that **Base Position** was actually painful to lie in. Depending on what you're doing in **Base Position**, simply choose another pose that works for you. I began each of my sequences in **Easy Pose**. If it was for **Relaxation** I would opt for the side-lying **Sleeping Beauty Pose** (see below).

Body Tap: The **Body Tap** is perfectly fine, just avoid tapping your belly. You're free to tap everywhere else!

Bowing Lady: As your belly grows you will need to modify this pose by simply opening your knees wide, so your belly has somewhere to go as you bow down. From the third trimester you'll also want to place a pillow or block in front of you, so you're not taking your head lower than your heart.

Camel: **Camel Pose**, as I teach it in *Yoga for the Vagina*, is fine right through pregnancy as long as you keep the back-bend stretch focused on your chest area, as opposed to your belly. The full **Camel** pose taught in many other yoga styles is a no-go during pregnancy, as it is far too intense on the belly.

Child's Pose (and Extended Child's Pose): From the 20th week of pregnancy it's better not to take your head below your heart. So a simple way of adapting this pose is to bring in a bolster, place it under your chest and head, turn your face to one side, as you can see in the image, and rest in **Child's Pose** there. This is really yummy! You might even like to do **Child's Pose** like this when you're *not* pregnant!



Clapping Scarecrow: This pose is fine up until the 6th month, unless you're experiencing back pain while lying in **Base Position**. A beautiful alternative to this pose, and one that makes it safely dynamic for pregnancy and birth prep, is to use **Easy Pose** or **Rock Pose** as your **Base Position**. From there, take your arms straight out to the sides, like a scarecrow. On the inhale and squeeze, slowly moving your hands in front of you until your palms meet, then exhale and slowly release your arms back out to the sides. It can be really beautiful on the exhale to imagine you're opening your heart to the world.

Cobra: As a general rule **Cobra** will be fine in the first trimester, however if you were like me and found your belly extra sensitive during this time, then avoid doing **Cobra**. As an alternative, sit in **Rock Pose** and open your chest, similar to how you would do the **Camel**, for a soft back-bend. Keep it soft and aim for the stretch to be felt more in your chest as opposed to your belly.

Cobra to Plank: Again, this may feel fine in the first trimester, however, if you do continue to do it during early pregnancy, my suggestion is to only do the **Plank** on your knees, not the full **Plank** on your feet. Your belly is busy creating new life so it's already got its hands full. You don't want to be adding extra work to that region at this time.

Easy Pose: Regardless of how flexible you feel you are, once you enter the second trimester, my recommendation is to sit yourself up high on a cushion or bolster when going into **Easy Pose**. Once you cross your legs they will naturally be higher than the mat, so roll some blankets up into mini bolsters and let them take the full of weight of your legs. If you let your legs splay out too far (without the blankets for support) you may irritate the connective tissue that holds your legs in place.

Because we're far more flexible during pregnancy, it's important to be careful you don't accidentally overstretch. This is why it's so important to fully support yourself. Plus, it will help you be able to sit for a longer period of time and remove all strain from your lower back, your abdominal muscles, even from your upper back. Having this padding beneath you will also create a beautiful counter-pressure to the pelvic floor.

Elephant Walk: Skip the **Elephant Walk Mini** in the third trimester, and only do it earlier in pregnancy it feels ok to do so. This posture is extremely dynamic! You may not feel up to it in first trimester due to possible nausea, and you want to avoid inversions in third trimester.

Forward Hang: When you're invited into the **Forward Hang**, the most important thing to remember - especially during third trimester - is to bend your knees really generously to both come into the posture and to leave the posture. This will help you avoid getting too dizzy. You may also like to adapt this pose, especially later in your pregnancy to a more pregnancy enhancing pose that involves using a block, as you can see in the image.

Legs wide apart, as you hinge forward, take your back down so it's straight and parallel with the floor, hands resting on a block (or 2). Inhale and windmill your left arm up to your left, keeping your arm relaxed but straight, following your hand with your eyes. Then exhale it back down to your bolster. Inhale your right arm up to the sky, exhaling it back down. Continue to do this moving posture, which is beautiful for helping baby position and supporting breast health so your milk comes down naturally post-birth. It will also help an achy back or sciatica.



Froggies: These are fine up until the last trimester when you want to stop doing them, so you're not taking your head below your heart. The only thing I will say about **Froggies** in early pregnancy, is to really listen to your body. This is a dynamic pose, so you want to keep checking in that you don't over exert yourself, as your body is much more sensitive at this time in your life.

Goddess Pose: If you're like me during my pregnancy and find back ache prevents you from feeling comfy in **Goddess Pose**, even when you take your props, simply come into a **Butterfly pose**, without the leg flutter. You can either sit up tall which will build lower back strength, or lean forward for an extra stretch through your groin.

Happy Baby: This is another pose we skip once into the third trimester so that you're not lying for extended time on your back.

Hover: This posture works the abdominals quite strongly, so you want to halve the time you would usually spend in it for the first and second trimester, and then ditch it altogether for the final trimester.

Legs Up A Wall pose: If it feels good, do it. Especially if you're experiencing swollen feet and ankles. This will help with the water retention issue. In third trimester however, just limit your time spent in this posture to no more than 3-minutes at a time (as long as it still feels good) so you don't interfere with your circulation.

Life Nerve Stretch: As your belly grows, this pose will become increasingly more difficult. Simply part your legs so they form a triangle, and you can either hinge forward through the centre, and/or turn to face your left leg, hinge down to the left, come back up, and then do the same on the right. Let your inner voice guide you on how best to stretch out your hammies here.

Love Scoop: The **Love Scoop** is perfectly fine to do all through your pregnancy. I just wanted to offer an alternative that will make it a little more yummy for you and baby. Massage your ovaries as usual, and then instead of bringing the energy up to your breasts, take the energy to your belly to nourish your growing baby, resting your hands on your belly, and using that time to connect with the little one.

Mermaid: **Mermaid** is generally fine during pregnancy if you keep listening to your body. As your belly begins to grow you'll need to softly iron out the wave-like motion in your body so you don't hit your belly on the floor. Moving straight from **Rock Pose** through to a **Knee Plank** and back (without the undulation), is a nice option later in pregnancy.

Pelvic Lifts: See how you go with his one. You may find in the third trimester that you skip this one, as your head will be below your heart as you roll up. You can substitute this pose with **Pussy Cat** or **Spinal Flex**; something that helps warm up the spine at the start of your practice. Or you may like to continue doing this posture and rest in the **Pelvic Lift** with a block or big cushion under your pelvis to hold you in position.

Prance: **Prance** is another strong abdominal pose, so this one should be avoided during pregnancy. Instead see **Single Leg Lifts** (below) for an alternative posture that's more gentle as baby grows.

Pussy Cat: This is a super potent pose for pregnancy and birth prep with many benefits; helping strengthen the lower back, lessening lower back pain, decreasing hip pain, strengthening the abdominals in a way that's healthy for your growing baby, encouraging baby to move into the ideal birthing position, helping with round ligament pain, and naturally activating the pelvic floor.

When you're doing the traditional **Pussy Cat** however, you just want to ensure as your pregnancy progresses that you're not over-stretching. It's often recommended that you move from the **Tabletop position** to the **Cat position** (back arched up, chin to chest) and forget the part where you would normally drop your belly and look up, however as long as you listen to your body and avoid extreme swayback, then coming into the Cow part of the posture (belly dropping to the floor, heart beaming forward) is ok, as long as you keep it soft and focus the bend through your chest as opposed to your belly.

If you do find you have lower back pain, you may like to come into your **Pussy Cat** position and spend some time wagging your imaginary tail to help release your sacrum and lower back, or do some **Hip Circles of Figure 8s** while on all fours. Get a little creative and allow your pelvic region to move as it needs to move in order to release any stored tension.

Rock-Around-the-Pelvic-Clock: This pose is fine to do while pregnant as long as you're not having lower back pain that makes **Base Position** ouchy. You'll also want to adjust this pose beyond 6 months so you're not lying on your back. A lovely alternative is to come onto all fours into **Pussy Cat** and do the **Rock-Around-the-Pelvic-Clock** in that position, as there are lots of juicy benefits in moving the pelvic area in your **Pussy Cat** position.

Rock N' Roll: As your belly grows, you'll probably find it quite difficult to **Rock N' Roll**. If this is the case, to move from a lying to a sitting position, simply come onto your left side, and use your right hand for support in helping you gracefully come up into a sitting position.

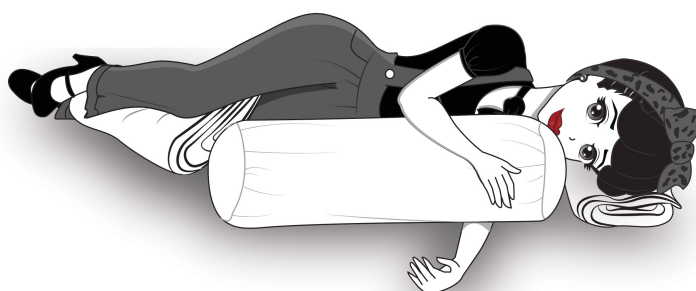
Self-Love Blessing: It can be really beautiful to use the **Self-Love Blessing** as an opportunity to bless not only yourself, but your baby as well. Feel free to slightly modify the words to either 'We are beautiful... We are bountiful... We are blissful... We are love,' or you may prefer to direct the blessing purely to your baby with 'You are beautiful... You are bountiful... You are blissful... You are love.'

Sipping: If you're using your Jade Egg in your pregnancy practice, and you find lying in **Base Position** doesn't work for you due to back pain or it being third trimester, you can **Sip** from **Pussy Cat** or lying on your left side, with your floor leg bent and your right leg bent so the sole of your foot is flat on the floor; sort of like you're in **Butterfly** pose lying down.

If you're not using your Jade Egg during your pregnancy practice you may like to use the extra time in the guided sequences to continue massaging your vulva area, with a focus on the perineum - as you want a soft and supple perineum for birth. Or you may wish to use that time to add in a pose of your choosing, perhaps one of the extra poses at the end of this guide.

Shoulder Stand: **Shoulder Stand** is generally fine for the first trimester of pregnancy if you feel well enough to do it. If not, substitute it for a different pose of your choosing. Beyond first trimester it's recommended you don't do **Shoulder Stand** as it's an inversion and you want to keep your head above your heart. On top of that, **Shoulder Stand** compresses your lungs and you don't want to restrict oxygen to your little one, especially later in pregnancy as baby starts to take up more room and also put pressure on your breathing capacity.

Sleeping Beauty Pose: After the first trimester it's recommended you lie on your side - preferably your left side if comfortable - with your knees bent, and a cushion or bolster tucked in between them for support to keep your hips aligned. The pillow will help keep the hips in a more horizontal position, which in turn reduces strain on your lower back. This is also the position that's recommended for sleeping in.



Sphinx: As per **Cobra** recommendations.

Spinal Twist: It's ok to continue doing **Spinal Twists** through pregnancy, simply make them softer and gentler. You don't want to put too much pressure on your belly. Remember, a little goes a long way.

Squats: Balance during pregnancy can be difficult, so if you find you can usually squat but it becomes more difficult as your baby belly grows, you can either **Squat** against a wall, so your back is flush against the wall for support, or you can put a block or some books under your booty for some extra support. These are great ways to support your **Squat** as you get closer to birth and will make the posture more nourishing. **Pregnancy Caution:** Do NOT practise **squatting** if your doctor has indicated that your cervix is soft or opened before term.

As you've probably heard, assisted seats - such as **Squats** - are the superior positions for giving birth because they allow a much greater opening of the pelvis than lying down, they let you generate stronger and more efficient voluntary expulsive forces that are better coordinated with contractions, and you have gravity on your side! All of that said, if you choose to squat to give birth, ensure your birth partner/team is helping to hold you in the **Squat**.

If you're **squatting** by yourself - where you're carrying your own weight - you'll fatigue the muscles and drain oxygen away from your uterus to your thighs. This then sets off adrenalin, which will compromise the oxytocin that you want to have pumping through your body. Oxytocin is your love hormone and you want LOTS of it in your system to help offset the intensity of birth.

In addition to this, you only want to be **squatting** during the second stage of labour, not the first stage. If you **Squat** during the first stage of labour you narrow the top (or the inlet) of the birth canal and open the bottom (or the outlet). It's not until baby is well engaged and deep into the pelvis (second stage of labour) and you have that sensation to push, that it's time to **Squat**.

Single Leg Lifts: Once you know you're pregnant it's best to ease off on the abdominal workout and let your belly region spend its energy making your baby. So in the first 5-6 months of pregnancy, adapt your pose as per the image below to **Seated Leg Lifts**. Sit with your legs stretched out. Place your hands on the floor behind your hips and lean back, keeping your arms, spine and neck straight.



Inhale as you bring your left leg up, exhale as you gently place it down. Then inhale your right leg up, exhaling it down. Continue to rotate legs, being mindful only to lift to a height that feels comfortable for you. If your leg only comes an inch off the floor, that's perfect.

Beyond 6 months you may still feel ok to continue with this modification, perhaps lifting a little lower the bigger your belly grows. Or you can do **Side Leg Lifts** as per the second image. Lay on your left



side, bending your left leg slightly to balance your body in this posture. Rest your head on a pillow or your left arm, with your right hand on the floor for balance. Inhale as you lift your leg up, and exhale as you release it down, aiming to keep your leg straight, knee unlocked. Then switch and do the other side.

T-Rex: If **T-Rex** feels comfy for you, you can do it right through pregnancy, the only thing you want to be mindful of, is that you don't back-bend too far in this pose. Ideally keep the bend gentle and more focused on opening your chest area, independent of the rest of your back.

Windscreen Wipers: If you find lying flat on your back too uncomfortable at any stage during pregnancy, simply sit up in the position you would for **Seated Leg Lifts** (as above) and do your **Windscreen Wiper** feet from there.

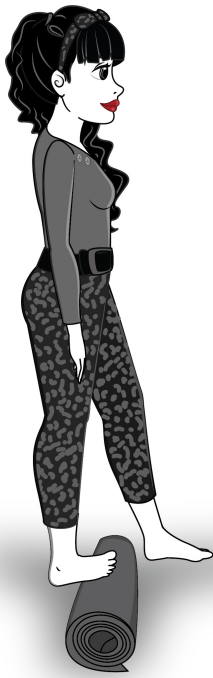
Want some extra poses to play with during your pregnancy?

Arm Strengtheners: Sit in **Easy Pose** (or **Rock Pose** or on a chair with feet flat on the floor), interlock your fingers with your index finger stretched out, as per the first image. Stretch your arms so they're parallel with the floor. Hold this pose taking long slow deep breathes for a full 3-minutes. You may like to add a vaginal squeeze on the inhale and a release on the exhale.

An alternative to this pose, is to take your hands up high and let them frame your head like in the second image, or take your arms out to the sides so they're parallel with the floor, palms down, and hold there. Arm strengtheners help build both physical and emotional resilience in preparation for labour.



Booty Swish: Place your hands on the mat coming into all fours as you would for **Pussy Cat** pose. Without moving your hands or knees from their position, move your torso back a fraction so your arms are on a slight diagonal. Then taking long slow deep breaths, begin to swish your booty to the left and then the right, like your slowly wagging your imaginary tail. This is really beautiful for easing lower back pain, helping to increase mobility in the pelvic area and sacrum. You can also move from here into **Hip Circles** or **Figure 8s**, which can feel really yummy.



Calf Stretches: Standing, step the ball of your foot onto a rolled towel or yoga mat. Make sure your heel is grounded on the floor. This may be enough of a stretch for you. If you want to make it a little stronger, step your other foot in front of the rolled mat/towel, like in the image. Hold for 30-seconds, then switch and do the other side. This gives length to your hamstrings so your sacrum and buttock muscles are more mobile when you need your pelvis to open for your baby during descent in labour.

BREAST MASSAGE

Breast massage forms a big part of the *Yoga for the Vagina* sequences and this is extremely beneficial during pregnancy as it helps iron out any lumps or stagnation that would get in the way of you breastfeeding more easily once baby arrives. Breast massage can also bring comfort to your breasts during pregnancy as they become sensitive (their weight increasing by around 1.5) in order to prepare for their new role in sustaining the life of your newborn.

Just a couple of things to keep in mind as your pregnancy develops... Stimulation of the nipple and areola releases oxytocin, just like in breastfeeding. This is super healthy during pregnancy, however you may want to limit the direct nipple-play in the third trimester (no more than 30-seconds or so), as spending several minutes on your nipples is actually a natural way of ramping up oxytocin release with the goal of hastening labour. Perfect to use during labour or if you're over-due (to bring on labor), but not so much something you want to do before baby is fully developed. Thus, you would want to avoid this targeted stimulation from around mid-pregnancy to week 38.

Once baby arrives, breast massage (including all breast tissue up toward the armpit) is excellent for breastfeeding, right before and during a feed. Massage helps move the milk through the milk ducts and helps combine the more aqueous milk (sometimes called fore-milk) with the higher fat portion (sometimes called the hind-milk). It's a bit like shaking up a bottle of unhomogenised cow's milk to combine the milk and the cream. The fat content of milk tends to be sticky so it stays in the milk ducts until partway through a feed. Massage before feeding helps combine the two parts of the milk so baby gets a more nutrient-dense feed, earlier on.

PERINEUM MASSAGE

If you're a little concerned about how you're going to push something the size of watermelon out of your vagina, don't be. The body can do miraculous things if we support it in doing so. And one of those things we can do is regular perineum massage, especially in the third trimester. You will have noticed in various sequences in *Yoga for the Vagina*, I encourage you to massage your perineum. There are lots of delicious nerve endings there to ignite your pleasure!

However, when it comes to pregnancy and birth prep, the main reason for perineum massage is to help the area soften and become more pliable - more flexible - so it can easily stretch without tearing, to let your baby out. If you haven't yet explored this yummy part of your anatomy, the perineum is the soft skin between the vaginal opening and the anus. This is the areas that is prone to tearing in childbirth. However, massaging the area can help avoid this.

Perineum massage is said to ease the 'ring of fire' so often experienced when baby's head is crowning, and will also help you avoid needing an episiotomy (If you want to avoid an episiotomy, don't give birth lying on your back). External stimulation of the perineum is fine the whole way through the pregnancy, but you don't want to begin the full perineum massage as I explain here, until Week 34.

Make sure your hands are super clean, nails trimmed. Begin by having a warm bath or putting a warm washcloth compress on the area for ten minutes to help the area soften. Lie in a comfortable position - perhaps propped up with some cushions - on a towel, and relax. You want to invite your vagina and your bottom to completely let go. Apply coconut oil to your perineum and gently massage circles on that small bit of skin between your anus and perineum. You may spend a few minutes doing this - to help it relax even further - before taking the massage internal.

Slip one or two thumbs about an inch into your vagina (to about the knuckle of your thumb) and apply gentle, firm pressure straight down on your perineum. Taking long slow deep breathes, on each exhale allow the perineum to relax and stretch a little bit more. Hold here, allowing the stretch to deepen for 1-2 minutes. You can expect to feel stretching, and perhaps a tingling sensation, but if it becomes painful or you feel it burning, ease off a little.

Once the perineum has been stretched for a couple of minutes, gently move your thumb/s up along the sides of your vagina, stretching it from side to side. You may like to imagine you're running your thumb/s along the inside of a bowl from one side to the other. Continue doing this for a few more minutes as long as it remains comfortable. Ideally you want to do this massage a few times a week to help prepare your perineum for your gorgeous birth day! You can do this alone, or you can work it into one of your *Yoga for the Vagina* sequences.

THE BREATH DURING PREGNANCY

Consciously connecting to your breath during your yoga practice will set you up for consciously connecting to your breath through child-birth. I hear from so many new mums that it was the breath used in their yoga practice, that helped them through labour. This is because the breath is the medicine for pain, as it helps produce oxytocin and endorphins into the body which bring euphoric pleasurable feelings into your being to help counter-act pain. Endorphins are your happy juice. You want to be creating bucket loads of oxytocin and endorphins during pregnancy, hence why the breath is so powerful.

So now we know the breath is one of our main tools for labour, it's important to know that there are a few breathing techniques you need to avoid during pregnancy. **Breath of Fire** is one of them. **Breath of Fire** stimulates your system and your body is already being stimulated through the pregnancy. It doesn't need extra heat! To avoid overstimulating you system, if you're doing a sequence that includes a pose that uses **Breath of Fire**, simply do the pose with long slow deep breathing instead.

You also want to avoid retaining or suspending the breath. When we're pregnant, we're breathing for ourself and our body, and holding the breath (either in or out) will deprive the baby of necessary and valuable oxygen. The baby needs lots of oxygen nutrition to grow and thrive, so really focusing on taking in lots of air, both on and off the mat, will serve your baby well. Something else to keep in mind, is that just as the baby takes on its mother's mind patterns, it also takes on its mother's breath patterns. If you're breathing slowly and consciously, your baby will feel far more relaxed and centred.

When you're doing your yoga sequences while pregnant, it can be a really beautiful practice to smile and breathe down into your child - bringing conscious awareness to the presence of your child - imagining you're delivering your child the nutrients it needs to grow and flourish. Your baby feels

everything inside the womb. During the rests between the poses, it's also really lovely to place your hands on your belly (as opposed to your heart or ovaries, as often directed) to help you build a deeper connection with your child. This is where every yoga practice can become an opportunity to bond with baby.

Staying connected to your breath will help you stay present in your body, and that's something you want on your birth day. You don't want to abandon yourself as the contractions grow. Practising *Yoga of the Vagina* regularly throughout your pregnancy where you let the breath be your main focus, will help you practise staying in your body, help you grow your love for yourself and your baby and help you feel able to fill your body with the pleasure-hormones that will support your birthing experience.

IN SUMMARY...

Above any advice I can give you here, the most important yoga guide for a pregnant women is listening to her own body. Really feeling into each posture, each small movement, and noticing 'Does that feel good? Or do I need to ease off a little?' This kind of razor sharp awareness of your changing body will help support you in experiencing a yoga practice that will nurture your pregnant body and your gorgeous baby.

For me, about 6 weeks into my pregnancy I found **Base Position** triggered pain in my right lower back, so I was required to avoid this position completely, and find alternatives. If something like this happens, modify the practice to suit your body. For me, I substituted **Base Position** with supported **Child's Pose** (with a bolster), **Easy Pose**, or the side-lying **Sleeping Beauty**, depending on what I was wanting to explore in that posture.

Your body will go through many changes in the 9-months of pregnancy as it adapts to accommodate your growing baby and prepares you to be a mother. Parts of your body like your bladder will start behaving differently. You'll need to pee a lot! Whatever you do, embrace frequent toilet trips, as waiting to urinate can cause the wee to back up into your kidneys and upset them. You may find despite years of Jade Egg practice, that when you sneeze, because of your smaller bladder capacity, that if you haven't gone to the toilet in the last five minutes, that you do pee a drop or five.

This doesn't mean your sexual organs are prolapsing, or that you need to compensate by using your Jade Egg even more (or use it at all if you're not feeling drawn to). It's simply a sign of your body doing just what it needs to accommodate this new life growing inside you. Celebrate this. Know that it's not forever, and that once baby is out, and you're past your first six weeks of recovery, you can use your Jade Egg again to help your lady parts gently return to their natural working order.

Be kind to yourself during this time, knowing that all of these changes are totally normal. Your body is undergoing massive change, and all the prep work you did before conceiving will certainly pay off once you birth and return to using your Jade Egg. You have built neural pathways that your body will remember, once it is free to focus more on you, as opposed to baby :)

Pregnancy amplifies everything you already have going on physically and emotionally.

Another common symptom you may experience is heartburn. This happens for two reasons. The relaxant in your body (which you need to facilitate your birth) causes the valve at the top of your stomach to relax, so it stops working as efficiently. As your baby takes up more space, it will also diminish the space for your stomach. Doing some gentle full body stretches, where you stretch your hands above your head, can help relieve this by creating more space.

In addition to your yoga practice, walking daily for at least six kilometres is a beautiful way to keep your pelvis active and aligned. You're quite literally rocking your baby to sleep when you're walking! But once again, don't feel bad if walking becomes too difficult for you as well. At week 32 putting weight on my right leg, as you do when you walk, became unbearably painful. So for a couple of weeks there, yoga became my main exercise.

Do what you need to support your individual pregnancy and the symptoms that pop up. You'll probably come into contact with various health professionals and other mums, that want to give you advice on what you 'should' do. While some advice is useful, take it with a grain of salt. What works for one person doesn't necessarily work for another. So really trust your intuitive knowing to decide which pieces of advice to follow, and above all else *always* listen to your True Self. If something doesn't feel right, then chances are, it's not.

POST-BIRTH YOGA

In the first few days after birth your focus is on lying down with baby, bonding and healing. Ideally you want to make arrangements so you have someone else (your partner, friend or family member) bringing you everything you need, doing the nappy changes, and allowing the space for your body to begin the healing process. Rest and then rest some more. If you don't allow your body the time it needs to heal and regenerate after birth, you run the risk of having sexual health issues later in life. You can only be fully there for your baby if you're being fully there for yourself.

Ideally this is the approach you want to take for 40 days after the birth. 40 days is what's observed around the world for sacred postpartum. It used to be called the 'lying in' period. Dedicate this time to healing and regeneration. Sleep when baby sleeps, and you will recover much quicker. What about exercise? Keep any physical movement you do during these 40 days soft and gentle. Ideally all you want to do is gentle walking, as this helps rejuvenate the pelvic area, bringing fresh blood to the vagina to help it heal, as well as the **Post Birth Yoga Mini** I've created for you below.

Babies are very soft and porous after birth. This is why in many cultures it's advised not to hand baby round to friends and relatives in the first 40-days. Giving the baby lots of skin-to-skin contact during this time is a crucial part of helping the baby feel safe and secure. A baby who has experienced this close bonding is far more likely to be confident and self-assured in their adult life, regardless of what's going on for them externally. These 40-days are where you build your babies sense of self.

The third day after birth is when the milk generally comes down. If this doesn't happen, breast massage and arm poses such as a gentle **Windmill** or **Heart Opener** will stimulate milk flow. What's important to remember when learning to breastfeed for the first time, is that if you're tense or stressed, it will stop the milk from flowing. If you find yourself getting tense, rely on your meditation and letting go techniques learnt through *Yoga for the Vagina*, to help release the body into a calm, peaceful state for breastfeeding. You must be relaxed to feed.

HEALING ABDOMINAL SEPARATION

The stats show that 2 out of 3 women will experience abdominal separation during pregnancy. This is when your external abdominal muscles - your six pack muscles - split down the centre to make room for baby. So while it's extremely common during pregnancy (especially in women who have super tight ab muscles pre-pregnancy, which stops them stretching), if left untreated post-birth, it can lead to pelvic floor issues, poor core strength, back pain, hernias and a bulging belly. Hence, we want to get in early and heal any separation that may have occurred.

How do I know if my abs have separated? The easiest way to check, is to lie on your back with your knees bent and lift your chin to your chest. Using your fingers touch along the centre of your abs where your belly button is and if you feel a soft spot or a gap, this indicates separation. One or two finger widths is normal (If it's wider than this, it may be a good idea to see a physical therapist). If you feel nothing at all you can rest assured yours are together. You'll know there is some form of separation if after birth it's difficult to get out of bed or sit up. This is because the muscles are not joined, so you can't create the intra-abdominal pressure required to stiffen and keep your torso erect.

Now if you have experienced abdominal separation, the last thing you do is rush back into a full on ab workout. Abdominal exercises like crunches, sit-ups and planks are counter-productive when dealing with ab separation. You want to gently ease your muscles back into action to allow time for them to heal, and this **Post-Birth Yoga Mini** is specifically designed to gently rebuild the abdomen region.

Unless you've had a cesarean (check with your doctor if so as you don't want to open the incision or create further damage) then you are fine to begin doing this **Yoga Mini** within a couple of days of giving birth or when you personally feel drawn to. This Mini is great for women who both have and haven't experienced abdominal separation.

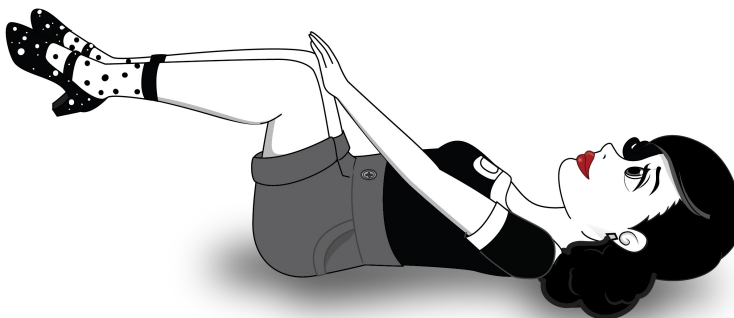
POST-BIRTH YOGA MINI

Lying in **Base Position**, begin with some deep belly breathing, feeling your belly expand on the inhalation and softly fall on the exhalation. Once you settle into your body, softly press the arch of your back into the floor, creating a flat spine. Place your hand on your belly, take a full breath in with the intention of expanding your abdominal muscles to push your hand up and away from the floor. As you exhale, contact your abdominal muscles and pull your belly towards your spine, essentially pulling your belly button to the floor. Do this 10 times.

Staying in **Base Position** move into some soft **Pelvic Tilts**. To do this, inhale as you curl your tailbone up towards your belly button while engaging your abs and pressing your lower back into the floor, thus taking the curvature out of your spine. Then as you exhale, untuck your tailbone down creating a small arch through your lower back. This is the same action you would have experienced in the **Pelvic Thrusts found** in the *Pure Pleasure sequences*, only you're lying down instead of standing. Do this slowly 10 times, then take 30-seconds to focus on deep abdominal breathing.

Finally, lift your legs so they remain hip-width apart, knees directly above your hips and calves in line with the floor, as per the image. Bring your left palm to your right knee, gently activate through your core and press your knee into your hand, and your hand into your knee, creating gentle resistance. Hold for 30-seconds continuing to breathe nice and deep into your abdomen, then release the hold for a full breath in and out. Switch sides, your right palm coming to your left knee and hold the contraction for 30-seconds, then release for a full breath. Do 5 sets like this.

Ideally you want to begin this little **Post-Birth Yoga Mini** within a few days of giving birth and do it 1-2 times per day. Of course, listen to your body and what it needs to make a full recovery. You may also like to include a gentle pose such as



Sufi Grinds - which activate your pelvic floor. Aside from walking, these are the poses you want to be your main exercise for the first six weeks post birth. Only then, once you've had your six-week check-up, are you free to gently move back into your softer *Yoga for the Vagina* poses and sequences, such as those in the Layer 1.

OTHER WAYS: If you find it difficult to hold your legs up in the final position of the Mini, simply rest your calves on a chair or a yoga ball.

GIFTS: This little **Yoga Mini** targets the transverse abdominals as well as the pelvic floor muscles, which together create a strong core. Doing this Mini once to twice a day is one of the most effective ways to target the bulk of the abdomen while repatterning and improving strength through your entire mid-section, making it the perfect medicine for post-birth recovery, even if you haven't experienced abdominal separation.

The third pose in particular - which can be done alone if you're short for time - mostly impacts the anterior functional line of muscles. The main objective with this particular pose is muscle repatterning as opposed to actual strengthening. You're using an isometric hold as you breathe through the 30-seconds of resistance, ensuring that you're making activation independent of breathing. In this sense you're gently teaching the muscles and fascia to re-align.

AFTER YOUR SIX-WEEK CHECK-UP

Once your GP or midwife has given you the all clear to start having sex, you're free to begin using the Jade Egg again and start enjoying more of your yoga poses. Be aware however, that your body will be softened by the relaxant after birth and during breastfeeding, so you can't go straight back to a full strong practice, because the body will be too pliable. My suggestion is to begin with the Layer 1 30-minute sequences using the Jade Egg only *if* you feel ready.

You might spend a good couple of months simply working through the Layer 1 sequences, gently rebuilding your strength. And don't be surprised if having learnt how to sip the egg inside when you originally began the course, that you now need to re-train these muscles to sip again. Be kind and gentle to your body. Understand that birth has stretched you in many ways - physically, mentally and spiritually - so you want to approach your *Yoga for the Vagina* practise with a beginner's mind.

By the time you work through the six layer 1 sequences six times each, your body will in most cases, be feeling ready to return to the 1-hour Layer 2 sequences where you can continue to rebuild your strength and physical resilience. But of course, listen to what your body is calling for. And if you simply need to stay on the Layer 1 sequences for a year or longer, do that. They are beautifully nurturing and will support your body in healing. Let your *Yoga for the Vagina* practice support you in falling in love with your body all over again.

EXTRA RESOURCES

While *Yoga for the Vagina* really is the perfect tool for easing pregnancy symptoms and preparing the mind, body and soul for an easeful birth, it's so very important to educate yourself about birth, as the caregivers you choose for your birth day will play a big role in the type of birth you experience. I know there is such a HUGE array of different resources out there to sift through, so I understand it can be a little overwhelming to know where to start. That's why I've popped together a list of the most valuable resources I came across, for the preparation of my birth...

BOOKS

Birth with Confidence by Rhea Dempsey
Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering by Sarah J. Buckley
Ina May's Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Gaskin
Mindful Birthing by Nancy Bardacke
Orgasmic Birth by Elizabeth Davis and Debra Pascali-Bonaro
The Down to Earth Birth Book by Jenny Blyth
The First Forty Days by Heng Ou
The Yoga of Birth by Katie Manitsas

For the birth partner, my husband found great value in these two books:

Cheers to Childbirth by Lucy Perry
The Birth Partner by Penny Simkin

DOCUMENTARIES

The Business of Being Born
The Face of Birth
Spinning Babies

Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy exploring this gorgeous rite of passage, and new chapter in your spiritual evolution. Let this guide be your pregnancy yoga handbook. Absorb the learnings, embody the new way of softening and opening as you move through each pose, and most of all, allow the beauty that is pregnancy and birth to radiate forth. *You are ready for this!*

Birthing a baby is an opportunity to have a taste of enlightenment.