

# Prenatal yoga guide

**W**hat is yoga? The word yoga is translated from Sanskrit, and means “union,” that is, union of the body, mind and spirit. From a yogic point of view, life is to be enjoyed and experienced fully. And with pregnancy, there is more joy.

So what is prenatal yoga? Prenatal yoga is the nurturing activity undertaken when time is spent (a little or a lot) to gently relax, release and attune to your body and your rapidly growing baby within. The natural, vital and restorative energies of the body and mind are enhanced through gentle yoga postures.

When pregnant, moms-to-be feel the strains of the ever-changing body, particularly the new demands on the back. Yoga work counterbalances the growing abdomen and maintains good posture. Stretching while strengthening helps to release the pelvic opening in preparation for birth. Toning the pelvic floor allows for a more controlled birthing, lessens complications, and enhances postnatal healing.

## General guidelines you should follow in your prenatal yoga class:

- Do not participate in ‘hot’ yoga.
- Do not lie on your stomach after the first

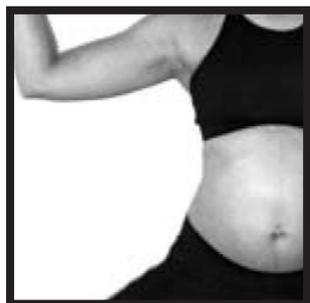


trimester (12 weeks).

- Do not hold the ‘downward dog’ pose when:
  - It is not comfortable (you may however, be able to hold the pose for less time)
  - If there is nausea or heart burn
  - If a baby has successfully turned from a breech to cephalic position (especially after 36 weeks). It is better not to disturb the baby that is settled in the narrowing of the pelvis. In downward dog, with the torso's inversion, gravity could allow the baby's position to shift.

## Poses that require you to lie on your back:

There are a few thoughts



on this. Most women will naturally turn off their back when they become uncomfortable, so there is an inherent ‘safety’ mechanism. Exercise recommendations suggest that you not lie on your back for more than 30 seconds consecutively. Ask your instructor for his/her advice.

## Squatting poses:

Squatting is inadvisable if there is a concern of premature labour, an incompetent cervix, troublesome knees, or pubic



symphysis pain. If a woman is not comfortable in a full squat, she may enjoy a supported or modified squat.

## If you can't continue with your yoga class:

If a woman cannot continue with her yoga class because something has developed that requires bed rest, the breath work, visualization and vocal toning learned from yoga can be very helpful for coping with

any anxiety or stress. Even in bed, arm work or, if possible, gentle leg movement, will help a woman feel more in control and allow her to still participate in her own well-being.

## Don't push yourself:

Pregnancy is not a time to learn advanced yoga postures. In a prenatal yoga class, advanced postures are not taught. However, if a woman who has been practising advanced postures (ie. shoulder stand, headstand, elbow stand), does not have any risks in her pregnancy, she may continue some of the advanced postures with the following considerations: 1) let comfort be your guide 2) slow down and modify your positions as your centre of gravity changes 3) always have someone watch you in case you lose your balance and 4) do not continue at your pre-pregnancy pace.

When looking to attend a prenatal yoga class, ensure that the teacher is a certified and experienced. \*

*Janice Clarfield teaches prenatal yoga and couples workshops for birth preparation, as well as yoga for adults of all bodies and ages. Janice trains and certifies professionals to teach prenatal yoga. 604-739-6664; janice@urbanyoga.ca; www.urbanyoga.ca*