

Review Article

THE BLISS YOGA INculcates DURING THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF PREGNANCY

PALLAV SENGUPTA^{1*}

Department of Physiology, Vidyasagar College for Women, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India.
Email: pallav_cu@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is the Sanskrit word for 'union', and through the practice of yoga the mind, body and breath are united. During pregnancy one lives and breathes with her baby and the baby becomes aware of her thoughts, movements and emotions; so it seems only natural that these should be included in yoga practice. These changes are reflected and supported by the practices of affirmation, meditation, *pranayama* (breathing techniques) and *asana* (poses) to help to unite with the baby through mind, body and breath. By deepening the awareness of the growing baby in this way, one can enhance and embrace all the stages of pregnancy and prepare herself mentally, physically and emotionally for labor, giving birth, and motherhood.

Keywords: Bliss yoga, Stages of Pregnancy.

The first trimester (first 12 weeks) of pregnancy is the most challenging in terms of practicing yoga. Although there is usually no visible evidence of the pregnancy, on the inside the body is going through rapid, daily changes. As the baby starts to make its home in the uterus, it develops from a single embryonic cell into a growing fetus [1]. The physical make-up of the growing baby is formed by the end of week nine, and by the end of the first trimester it is moving effortlessly around in its oceanic sea of amniotic fluid. During the first trimester, it is vital that to listen carefully to the body, letting the body's innate wisdom to be the guide and respecting any cues. Pregnancy is not the time to overexert physically; rather, it is a time to relinquish any temptations to overachieve and to focus instead on a mindful practice of meditation, *pranayama* and restorative yoga poses that honors both the changing body of mother and the growing baby. Practice of abdominal breathing improves circulation and respiration, soothes the nervous system; focuses and calms the mind up to 6th week. Heart opener poses strengthens the front of the thighs and ankles; lengthens the spine; opens the shoulders and the chest during 7th and 8th week. Supported reclining pose improves breathing and circulation; relieves tension in the shoulders; opens the upper chest; soothes the nervous system and calms the mind in 9th week. *Uttanasana* stretches the hamstrings, hips and calves; strengthens the thighs; and calms the mind (Week 10). *Vrksasana* opens the hips; strengthens the inner thighs and groin; calms the mind (week 11). Kegel exercises can increase the flexibility and elasticity of the pelvic-floor muscles, contributing to an easier birth and the prevention of tearing during delivery. Strengthening the muscles and learning to use them effectively can help to prevent instability of the pelvic floor during and after pregnancy. Practiced post-birth, they can encourage the uterus to contract and return to its original shape, tone the abdomen and help with the healing process (Week 12) [1,3].

As the mother enters the second trimester (Week 13-26), she feels more energized; this is the period when nausea, morning sickness and tiredness usually abate. The intention or aim for this stage of pregnancy is to help to prepare to give birth. *Prasarita padottanasana* stimulates the internal organs; tones the abdominal muscles; promotes a healthy digestive system; improves digestion and elimination; strengthens the spine; helps to relieve lower-back discomfort; stretches the inner and back leg muscles and lengthens the hamstrings (Week 13). Laughing Yoga opens the chest; it relieves tension in the face, jaw and throat and stimulates the muscles of the face (Week 14). *Ardha Chandrasana* strengthens the spine, ankles and thighs; opens the hips; stretches the groin, hamstrings, calves and shoulders; improves balance and calms the mind, helps to relieve pressure from the lower abdomen later in the second trimester (Week 15). The Cat sequence strengthens and

stretches the spine; helps relieve lower-back tension and helps alleviate pelvic girdle discomfort symptoms. It can be used in early labor to help alleviate back discomfort (week 16). *Viparita Karani* regulates blood flow; improves circulation; relaxes the nervous system; calms the mind; helps alleviate swollen ankles and calves; rests tired legs (Week 17). The Birthing Breath soothes the nervous system; focuses and calms the mind; improves concentration and helps to balance emotions. It is a useful breathing technique to use in labor. Using deep vowel sounds, as in this practice, can be a valuable tool during labor to help direct the energy down to the base of the body and help to relax the pelvic-floor muscles to ease delivery (Week 18). *Adho Mukha Svanasana* stretches the shoulders, front and back leg muscles; lengthens the spine; strengthens the arms and legs; helps relieve lower-back tension; calms the mind and rejuvenates the body (Week 19). *Malasana* stretches the groin, inner thighs and hips and strengthens the thighs (Week 20). *Virabhadrasana I* stretch the hamstrings, hips and calves; strengthens the thighs and lengthens the spine (Week 21). *Utkata Konasana* strengthens the spine, ankles, thighs and shoulders; opens the hips; stretches the groin, inner thighs and opens the chest (Week 22). *Parivrtta Sukhasana* improves digestion and elimination; lengthens the spine, helps relieve lower-back tension; calms the mind and helps balance emotions (Week 23). *Trikonasana* strengthens the spine; opens the hips; stretches the inner thighs, groin, hamstrings, calves and shoulders (Week 24). Standing Pelvic Rotations help relieve lower-back tension; improve mobility in the pelvis; release the hips and the pelvic girdle (Week 25). *Anjaneyasana* stretches the hips and upper thighs; strengthens the lower back and pelvic muscles; opens the chest; improves circulation and respiration (Week 26)[1,3-5,10].

During the final months of pregnancy (Week 27-40), mother is has to conserve energy and return to a practice of restorative yoga, meditation, visualizations and positive thinking. These practices help the mother to mentally prepare for labor and delivery of her child, encouraging one to focus on and develop qualities such as courage, patience, acceptance and trust. Breath techniques will be special during this trimester, as they are very useful in supporting during labor and delivery. The hormones released during the parturition are those designed to make the mother feel euphoric. If the mother can develop the ability to listen to her instincts, trust, have faith and surrender to the occasion, this, combined with the cumulative effects and habits of practicing yoga and meditation throughout the pregnancy, can all combine to make giving birth a spiritual as well as a physical and mental experience. By gently moving and exercising her body in an *asana* practice, she can become more aware of the needs of her body and her baby. She can learn to listen to and trust her intuition, and prepare her body

physically for the demands of labor, so that her body is open and ready to receive the birth of her baby with grace. By meditating on her breath, using different breath techniques and incorporating sound into her practice, she can become more familiar with the capacity of her body to naturally release tension and ease discomfort. By binding and uniting with her unborn child through the practice of affirmations, intentions and visualizations, she can prepare herself emotionally and spiritually, tuning in to and developing her inherent maternal instincts. These are the lessons she can learn and the gifts she can receive as she follows her yoga practice during her pregnancy, birth and on into motherhood. Supported Upavista Konasana stretches the inner thighs, hips and groin; relaxes the pelvic-floor muscles; lengthens the spine and releases tension in the lower back. It also helps to alleviate pelvic girdle discomfort symptoms (Week 27). Baddha Konasana stretches the inner thighs, hips and groin; relaxes the pelvic-floor muscles; lengthens the spine and releases tension in the lower back (Week 28). Virabhadrasana II stretches the hamstrings, hips and calves; strengthens the thighs and lengthens the spine (Week 29). Parsvakonasana stretches the shoulders, chest, hamstrings, hips and calves; strengthens the thighs and improves stamina (Week 30). Supported Reclining Twist with a bolster improves breathing and circulation; relieves tension in the shoulders and back muscles and calms the mind (Week 31). Marichyasana III Twist Variation improves digestion and elimination; strengthens and lengthens the spine, helps relieve back tension; stretches the shoulders and chest; calms the mind and helps balance emotions (Week 32). Thai Goddess Pose gives a strong stretch to the soles of the feet; this is the intention, however, uses it as an opportunity to practise the Birthing Breath and make deep vowel sounds to surrender into the stretch and help ease the discomfort. The Birthing Breath and deep vowel sounds can be valuable tools in labor to help direct the energy down to the base of the body and help to relax the pelvic-floor muscles to ease delivery (Week 33). Ardha Parsvottanasana stretches the hamstrings, hips and calves; strengthens the thighs and lengthens the spine (Week 34). Supta Baddha Konasana stretches the inner thighs, hips and groin; relaxes the pelvic-floor muscles; opens the upper chest; improves breathing; lengthens the spine and releases tension in the lower back (Week 35). Seated Namaste Flow strengthens and stretches the shoulders; opens the chest; releases the hips; improves circulation and focuses and calms the mind (Week 36). Balasana stretches the inner thighs, hips and groin; relaxes the pelvic-floor muscles; lengthens the spine; releases tension in the lower back. Child's Pose can be a useful pose to rest in between surges during the early stages of labor, offering respite and an opportunity to gather strength and resilience ready for the rising of the next surge (Week 37).

These Pelvic Rotations can be used during early labor to help keep me active during the surges and encourages one to move down the birth canal, aiding an easier delivery. I can rest in Child's Pose in between surges, offering me respite and an opportunity to gather strength and resilience ready for the rising of the next surge (Week 38). A Breath for Labor helps soothe the nervous system; focuses and calms the mind; improves concentration and helps balance emotions. A Breath for Labor is a useful breathing technique to use in labor, to help ease discomfort and focus the mind (Week 39). Savasana helps soothe the nervous system; focuses and calms the mind; relaxes the physical body and helps balance emotions (Week 40) [1, 3-11].

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