

Connect to the life within you

Prenatal yoga therapy is more than exercise for a would-be mother; it is truly an exercise for two.

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Today: Prenatal yoga therapy.

Prenatal yoga therapy engages you not only with your body but with your emotions, mind and spirit, to nurture and develop your unborn child.



It embraces the holistic approach to healing and just as a pill cannot completely heal a pain or illness, you and your baby will not achieve the full benefits of the postures (asanas) in a prenatal yoga therapy session without the breathing (pranayama) and concentration of the mind. Prenatal yoga therapy engages you not only with your body but with your emotions, mind and spirit, to nurture and develop your unborn child.

Physically it helps keep your body strong and flexible at a time when you are dealing with additional weight and hyperactive hormones, giving you tools to combat the fatigue, backache, digestive disorders associated with pregnancy and assist you in labour and delivery. The squatting, bending and stretching release and lengthen, make more space for your baby and allowing the breath to flow more freely, calming you and providing more oxygen for you and your baby. Regular practice strengthens the endocrine and nervous systems which are vital for a health pregnancy and birth.

Release

Emotionally, prenatal yoga therapy releases deeply stored feelings and mood swings common during pregnancy that can affect you and your baby physically. Releasing these pent-up emotions puts you in touch with your intuition. As your muscles relax and your breathing deepens, you can tune into your body and begin to understand what is going on inside, connecting with the life growing inside you. Smile and communicate with your baby. "The best present in the world that a mother can give to her child is a healthy body and peace of mind."

The inside story

Nausea, fatigue, edema, bloating, backache... you guessed it. I'm pregnant. And the last thing I feel like doing is exercising. I know it's good not only for me but also for my unborn baby. So I drag myself, all bloated and swollen, just four months along, to Pharaoh's Club at Wafi for my first prenatal yoga therapy class with Acharya Nelson Thomas.

Upon entering the class, my ambivalence is immediately remedied. Lying on my back with my legs up the wall (Viparita Karani), I hear Nelson's calming voice, "Feel coool and pleasant. Smile, like a sweeet mother, loving her child." This pose releases the tension that causes swollen legs and ankles, explains Nelson, but more important calms you and your baby.

Directing the power

"Inhale the creative power and direct it to your womb. Say hello to your baby with a smile and extend your motherly love towards there." Listening to Nelson's melodic tone, I lie there and feel an amazing connection with my unborn child, "Thanks mom! I like this", I hear my baby talking to me.

Nelson instructs us to "stand up!" The 12 of us in the class follow and stand in a circle around a candle. I can feel the loving energy of others as we touch hands before beginning the modified version of sun salutation (Surya Namaskar), a series of postures adapted for pregnancy, to help alleviate backache, weak legs and cramps, reduce stretch marks, as well as control weight. "This is even helpful to correct the position of the baby and assists you in carrying the baby's weight," emphasises Nelson. And I can understand why. Doing all the squatting and leg lifts incorporated into the series of postures, I feel my leg muscles working and my pelvic region stretching. "That feels good, mom! You are making more space for me!" I respond with a light touch on my abdomen indicating to my child, "I am glad you're enjoying this, my child, it keeps me going", as I found all that bending and leg lifting quite challenging. After a few rounds it is time to sit down. "Is it over already, mom?" No. As we move from butterfly position (Baddha Konasana), bouncing our knees to open leg forward bend (modified Paschimottanasana), we listen to Nelson explain, "These postures help open the pelvic area for easier delivery and prevent constipation." "Whoa, mom! What are you doing out there? This is fun. I am rolling around in here." I smile to myself feeling an internal happiness.

Moving my attention back to Nelson... "Inhale a short breath into your abdomen and push that air down to your child, contracting and relaxing your muscles. Focus on your womb." I quickly realise I have muscles that never existed and learn that this breathing technique is important and will be useful during delivery.

Inhaling, extending my arms overhead and exhaling, bringing my arms bent down and back by my sides in Bhastriga Pranayama, I expand my chest during another, deeper breathing practice which Nelson explains releases tension in the breast area and is beneficial for pain as it increases blood and circulation.

Energy through breathing

"Breathe for two people," exclaims Nelson. "Seventy five to 80 per cent of energy enters the body through the breath, while 20 to 25 per cent comes from food and other sources. So now, breathe for two," Nelson tells us. A few more breathing and twisting exercises, I can actually feel my baby moving and again hear him talking to me, laughing, "Mom, you are tickling me."

We move to the final posture, lying on our backs, bending our knees from one side to the other, before Nelson prepares us for deep relaxation, surrounding us with pillows for comfort and completely covering our bodies with blankets. This is the best part for me.

"Relaaaxx! Focus your mind on your womb. Move your energy towards there. Feel like your baby is relaxing with you. Cover your baby as you are now covered and remember: Your child feels everyyything!" chants Nelson. I enter a timeless zone, with nothing or no one except my baby and me, feeling completely loose, relaxed and at peace as I hear my child say, "Good night mom and thank you."

— *Dr Ludmila Vassilieva can be contacted at the Holistic Healing Medical Centre in Dubai*

