



Prenatal Yoga

Supporting Healthy Pregnancy

by Andrea Blair Cirignano

It's not uncommon for women to find that yoga helps their pregnancy, and some even turn to yoga before they get pregnant.

"I asked a few teachers if I could sit in on their prenatal yoga classes to get closer to that female Mother energy," said local instructor Rachel Dawn Lowe, E-RYT, PYT, "I then became pregnant."

Lowe continued to take prenatal classes throughout both of her pregnancies and began to train to teach the practice with her first pregnancy.

Sometimes more advanced practitioners think that prenatal classes are too easy and not physically challenging enough, but Lowe sees important benefits.

"Prenatal yoga gives women two important things that regular yoga classes do not: permission to embrace the yoga body, by listening more and not feeling the need to push through poses, and a community of mothers, providing a place of open communication about pregnancy, labor and motherhood," Lowe says.

Many doulas, midwives and even doctors recommend yoga, not only as a great prenatal exercise but also a way to prepare for birth.

"Prenatal yoga helps women connect to the breath through a physical practice that gives their rapidly changing bodies more ease," said Anne Phylé

Palmer, RPYT, owner of 8 Limbs Yoga Centers in Seattle. "The breath is, to me, the most important tool for labor."

Although most local prenatal classes are in an open environment where women feel comfortable to talk about their bodies and most instructors will offer time to connect with baby, another common misconception about prenatal yoga is that it will be "some hippy kumbaya type of thing," said local yoga student Nichelle Hegstrom.

Hegstrom said she thought she would hate prenatal yoga but ended up loving it because she enjoyed the support of other women going through a similar experience. She ended up attending prenatal class three times per week during her pregnancy.

Hegstrom said she started prenatal yoga at about four months but, accord-

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ing to Palmer, anytime an expecting mother considers starting is the right time to roll out the mat.

For pregnant women looking to incorporate some yoga into their lives

when a local class doesn't fit onto the schedule, Palmer and Lowe both recommend cat/cow pose. (Start in all fours. Inhale as baby moves toward the mat and tailbone and gaze move up. Exhale and round spine as gaze moves toward baby.)

Once baby arrives, new mothers can continue their practice with postnatal yoga, also available at many local studios and some classes even welcome babies. The appropriate time to start prenatal yoga will vary from woman to woman and new moms should consult their doctor before starting to exercise again.

"Postnatal yoga helps women release stress and help the aches and pains of nursing and caring for a baby," said Palmer who added "[prenatal and postnatal] classes offer women a built-in community of women in similar stages of pregnancy and motherhood."

Palmer acknowledges that getting to postnatal classes can be challenging for a new mother balancing a full schedule with a new baby so one pose she recommends for a new mother short on time is downward-facing dog. Lowe suggests tree pose and side stretches for a new mother when she can't make it to a studio class.

Whether a woman does prenatal yoga and/or postnatal yoga and whether she gets on the mat at a studio or at home, the benefits of a mother's practice extend beyond her own body and mind and can improve the whole family dynamic.

"A calm and focused mama is going to be more able to be present and attentive to the needs of her baby," said Palmer.

Writer Andrea Blair Cirignano is a local yoga instructor with a journalism background. She believes yoga is for everyone and that each member of the community could benefit from the practice in some way, shape or form. Her articles highlight the unique pairing of this ancient practice with a modern Pacific Northwest lifestyle. Find out more about Andrea at abcycogi.com.