



SIMPLE YOGA FOR PRENATAL AND POSTPARTUM MOMS *By Nelia DeAmaral*

YOGA is simply the act of moving mindfully with the focus on breathing in a relaxed way. We learn to pay attention to sensations in the body, as a way of distracting habitual anxious thoughts of the mind. By breathing, we are undoing stress, and increasing endorphins – basically reconnecting with a sense of ease and pleasure! Some days the practice will come easier than others, and the mind will become quiet rather easily, and other days the practice may feel nearly impossible. Be patient and kind with yourself. Even if you think you are not getting any benefit, you will soon see cumulative effects of your practice. Practice when you can, and for whatever time you can spare. Enjoyment is key, so don't make it another task to get done. Listen to your body...if these poses feel uncomfortable or painful, stop. Check with your doctor if these poses are safe for you. In general, yoga should not be practiced until about 4-6 weeks postpartum (longer if you had a c-section or other challenges at delivery).

- **BEGINNING RELAXATION:** Begin lying or sitting. With each breath allow the exhalation to release tension from your mind and each area of your body. Allow the muscles, bones and joints to let go into the support of the ground. Practice for as long as you wish, but at least 2 minutes. As your mind wanders from time to time, bring the attention back to the air coming in and out through the nostrils
- **SIMPLE SPINAL TWIST:** Lift both knees, exhale deeply and drop the knees to one side. Keep arms in a T position. Breathe and imagine the breath coming up through the tailbone, to the top of the head and back down again, relaxing each muscle around the spine. If your arms cannot rest on the floor, place a pillow or blanket under the arm so you are not tugging on your shoulder.
- **BASIC FLOW-**This simple flow is a quick, easy way to reconnect with the body, disconnect from anxious thoughts and feel the movement of the spine. By freeing the spine and allowing the breath to direct the pace of our movements, we begin to regain control over our mental/emotional state.
 - **CHILD'S POSE:** Come onto hands and knees and bring tailbone back and sit on heels (use pillow if you cannot reach your heels or use pillow under head if needed for extra comfort). Widen the knees if the pressure on abdomen is uncomfortable. As you breathe in, feel the spine and back widen, as you exhale feel the spine lengthen. You may choose to repeat an affirmation as you breathe in such as "I am safe", or simply repeat the word "peace".
 - **CAT:** Come onto hands and knees and as you exhale, allow the belly to become concave and rise towards the spine. Lift the spine, widen the shoulders and let the tailbone drop. When the breath flows in again, come to flat back. When the breath flows out again,



allow the spine to dip down slightly and let the front of the chest, around the heart, open forward (do not do if you have lower back pain).

- **DOG:** From hands and knees, move back as if coming into child's pose and lift knees and bring weight back toward the heels, lifting the tailbone. As you breathe in, allow the breath to widen the shoulder blades, as you exhale, feel the length of the spine. Alternate bending one knee, then the other and feel the fluidity in your body.
- Return to CAT, then begin again with CHILD'S pose. Repeat as many times as desired.
- **BREATHING MEDITATION:** After practicing, it is helpful to end with an easy breathing meditation, known as Pranayama. In yoga, translates to mean "lifeforce" or "flow of life". By deepening our breath and learning to maintain a slow steady breath, we can more easily navigate challenging thoughts and emotions. This exercise will allow the breath to slow down and provides a focus for the mind. The breath will naturally deepen with quiet awareness, so there is no need to deepen the breath consciously. If you feel lightheaded, take a rest.
 - **3 PART BREATH:**
 - Begin in seated position, resting your shoulders down, and your head resting on your neck (i.e. not tilting down or back). Rest across the forehead and release the jaw.
 - In a comfortable sitting position (sit against wall if needed), begin to feel the breath in the lower belly. Release the belly muscles when the breath comes in. Do not try to deepen or change the breath, simply notice the sensation of the belly moving for 3 or 4 breaths.
 - Next move up the body to the diaphragm or stomach area. Relax those muscles as the breath comes in. Feel that area open and widen. Feel the corresponding muscles of your back also widen and open. Again, don't try to change the breath.
 - Next move the attention to the heart/chest area and again feel the area opening and widening as the breath comes in. Feel the same opening across the upper back.
 - Now as the whole body is breathing, feel the breath travel up the spine with the inhalation, and down the spine with the exhalation. Practice this for as long as you can maintain a relaxed focus.
- **ENDING RELAXATION (OPTIONAL)** Lie down for a few minutes and simply rest. If the mind becomes active again, affirm your intention to let go with each exhalation. Rest here as long as you wish.