

# labour of love

A gentle yoga workout to help mums to be keep strong and supple during the first trimester

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**THE FEW MONTHS OF** pregnancy are very precious. It is a time in our fast-paced lives when our bodies begin to change without our control. We are part of a journey to create life, a truly wonderful gift.

Whether we use this time to get to know ourselves is up to us. Hopefully we will take this time to embrace the union of body and mind and as a chance to face life in the present. To get to know ourselves better.

As Kahlil Gibran said in *The Prophet*: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you."

Practicing yoga through pregnancy has many benefits. It helps with lymphatic drainage to cut down on all those puffy hands and feet, and swollen joints. Muscle tone is strengthened, which helps maintain good posture. The endocrine system is kept healthy which helps reduce cellulite and weight problems. Monitoring the breath - noticing its ebb and flow - will help release any tension in your body.

Yoga quietens the mind. It allows you find the inner sanctum that can evade us all. Through yoga your mind and body will be strengthened for both the journey of pregnancy and the experience of birth - one of the most physical and emotional things we will do in our lives.

In other parts of our life we would not contemplate starting on something like a triathlon without preparation and training. Keep this in mind as you embark on this journey.

If you are new to yoga then it is recommended that you

start your yoga practice from the second trimester, after the first three months. This is due to the higher risk of miscarriage during the first few months. By the second trimester this risk is greatly reduced. If you have an established practice then you can continue with some modifications.

Your body releases the hormone relaxin during pregnancy which relaxes and stretches your ligaments. Do not use this as an excuse to increase flexibility as this is contraindicated and can cause more problems like back ache and symphysis pubis dysfunction. This is a condition that causes great pain in the pelvic area due to increased instability of the whole pelvic joint structure.

Try not to overextend your joints but use the muscles around the joints to keep you stable and relaxed. As you move in and out of the postures imagine the baby moving with you and enjoying the session as much as you.

The main rule is do what feels right for you and your body. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it.

## The First Trimester

Do not practice inversions, heavy twists or jumps. You will probably feel tired and may suffer from morning sickness. Yoga will help recharge your batteries and give you some inner strength to carry on through these weeks of immense change to your body.

Concentrate on postures which release tension from your shoulders and upper body. This will help improve your posture and prepare you for the extra weight of pregnancy. When performing any of the exercises, if you ever feel faint, stop and rest.

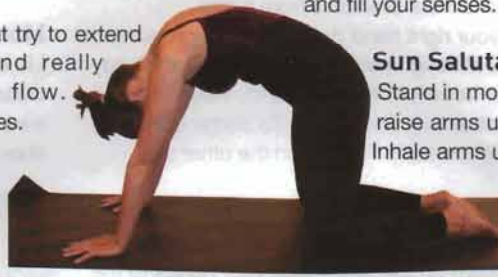
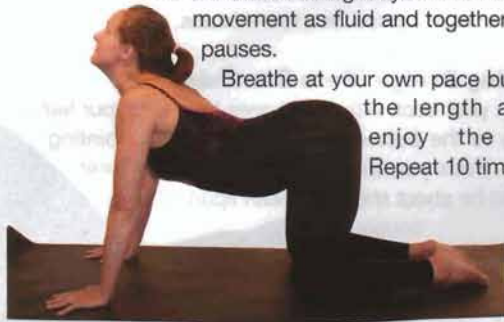
## Here is a suggested 1st Trimester practice

### Cat Pose (Marjariasana)

Start on all fours. Feel the floor ground you through your hands, knees and tops of your feet. As you inhale, arch your spine and look up slightly.

As you exhale curl your body in and tuck your head down and bring in your stomach. Make the breath and movement as fluid and together as possible with no large pauses.

Breathe at your own pace but try to extend the length and really enjoy the flow. Repeat 10 times.



### Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Stand upright and spread the weight between the balls of the feet and the heels. Allow the weight of your body to sink into your feet.

Lift through your arches. Strengthen your thighs. Lift the body through the abdomen and the chest. Relax the shoulders back and down your spine.

Let your arms hang lightly by your side. Push down and ground yourself. This will help you to feel a lengthening energy. Close your eyes and feel the inner calm expand and fill your senses.

### Sun Salutation (Suryanamaskar)

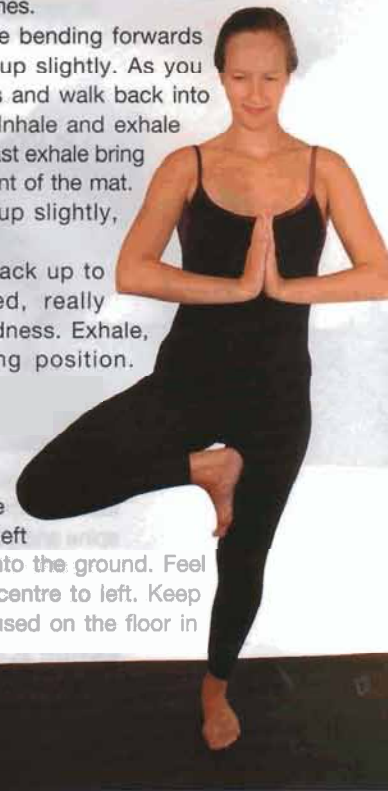
Stand in mountain pose (tadasana). Inhale as you raise arms up and exhale them down, four times. Inhale arms up, exhale and bend forward from the

hips towards the floor. (Bend legs here if needed). Inhale and rise up slightly, feeling the energy rise in the back of the spine. Exhale

release back down. Inhale, rise back up to mountain pose with arms extended. Exhale release back to starting position. Repeat three times.

Inhale arms up, exhale bending forwards and down. Inhale rise up slightly. As you exhale bend your knees and walk back into downward facing dog. Inhale and exhale here four times. On the last exhale bring your feet back to the front of the mat. Inhale, bring yourself up slightly, exhale release down.

Inhale, lift yourself back up to standing, arms raised, really inhaling in all the goodness. Exhale, come back to starting position. Repeat three times.



### One arm forward stretch

Bring one forearm into a right angle in front of you while still kneeling. Stretch the other out. Bring your head onto your bent arm as a headrest. Relax down and breathe here for a few breaths. Swap sides.

### Half downward dog

Starting on your hands and knees slowly move both arms forward bringing your head down to the floor. Stretch through your arms and fingers and plant your hands firmly down. This will help open up your shoulders. After a few breaths relax in child's pose.

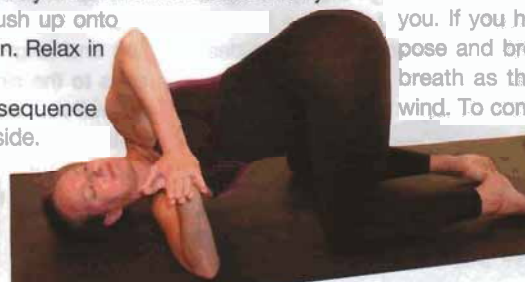
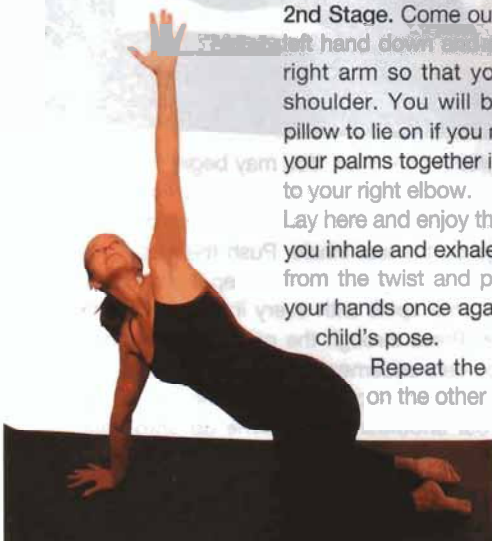
### Side twist sequence

1st stage. Start on all fours. Bring your right hand directly underneath your nose down onto the mat. Ground this hand down and lift out of the right shoulder. Inhale and raise the left arm out and up to the right. Turn your head towards your left. If this causes tension, bend your left arm and place your left hand on your left buttock. This will keep the twist open and lengthened without straining the shoulders. Remain here for a few breaths.

2nd Stage. Come out of this twist exhaling, bringing your left hand down onto the mat through the valley of the right arm so that you finally come to rest on your left shoulder. You will be twisting to the right now. Use a pillow to lie on if you need to. Bend your elbows and bring your palms together in prayer pose. You can then look up to your right elbow.

Lay here and enjoy the expansion of your belly and ribs as you inhale and exhale fully. To come out release slowly from the twist and push up onto your hands once again. Relax in child's pose.

Repeat the sequence on the other side.



### Tree pose (Vrikshasana)

Stand in mountain pose (tadasana). Make your left foot stable and dig it into the ground. Feel your weight shift from centre to left. Keep your eyes soft and focused on the floor in front of you.

Lift your right foot turning the right knee out to the side as you do this.

Bring the sole of the right foot onto the side of the left shin or thigh, but away from the knee.

Push into the sole of the foot and this will help stabilise you. If you have your hands free, bring them into prayer pose and breathe here for a few breaths. Think of your breath as the slow subtle movements of a tree in the wind. To come out exhale and slowly glide that foot back down to the floor on the exhale. Repeat on the other side.

**Standing side stretch (Ardha Chandrasana)**

Stand in mountain pose (tadasana) with your feet together. Bring your arms above your head on an inhale and place the palms of your hands together. Exhale here feeling the extension in your spine. Keep your shoulders down away from your ears.

On an exhale slowly bend your body off to the right. You may not bend very far. Just feel the energy being created within you and extend it from your feet all the way up to your fingertips. Keep the length of the spine and try not to hunch forward. Push into the feet to keep you grounded, while you rise upward like branches from a tree.

You can bring your right hand down to your right side to give you support, although keep the extension in the body and do not lean heavily into that hand. Keep looking forward and breathe fully and freely. To come up, on a nhal e rise back up to centre. Repeat on the other side.

**Lunge 1**

Start on all fours. Bring your left foot forward and keep your right knee down on the mat. Place your hands to the outside of the foot.

You could place your hands onto books or blocks to help lift you up and keep your spine elongated if you cannot reach the floor with your hands. Have a blanket under your right knee for padding. Push into your hands but keep your shoulders down and relaxed.

Let your head fall forward and feel the skin on the back of the neck lengthen. As you inhale think of your breath filling your pelvic region with warmth. As you

exhale mentally release any tension and feel your hips gently lower to the floor. Try to keep energized through your spine and do not let the body sag down.

Breathe here for a few breaths and then swap sides. You can insert a few cat stretches in between.

**Lunge 2.**

Come into a lunge again with your right foot forward but this time lift your left knee off the floor and press out through the heel of the left foot, balancing on your toes.

Now bring your right hand to the inside of the right leg. Feel the energy running up the left leg from the toes, through the calf muscle and thighs, to the buttock muscle. Continue that energy and lengthen through the spine up to the neck and head. Breathe here for few breaths and then swap sides.

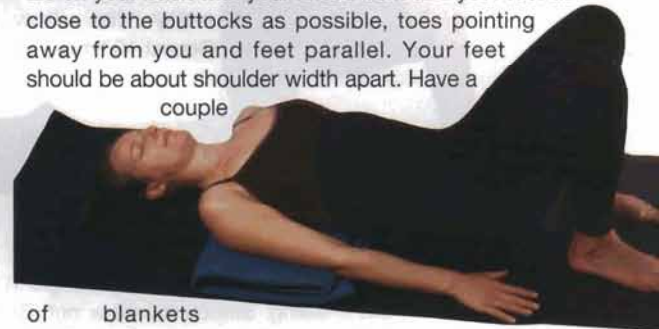
**\*Hip rotation.**

Kneel on all fours. As you exhale rotate your hips back and round in big circles. As you inhale continue to rotate them forward and round. Tighten your stomach muscles as you come forward to help protect your back. This will keep the spine extended in that part of the rotation and reduce spinal compression.

Move organically and breathe deeply and fully. Let your inhibitions fade on each exhalation. Rotate about five times this side and then rotate the other way around. Relax in child's pose for a few minutes.

**Moving Bridge (Setu Bandhasana)**

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet as close to the buttocks as possible, toes pointing away from you and feet parallel. Your feet should be about shoulder width apart. Have a couple



of blankets underneath your shoulders so that your neck relaxes back towards the floor and your chin raises up slightly.

This will help keep the chest open and relaxed and not compress any of the vertebrae in the neck. If you feel any pressure in the head at any time in this posture then come down slowly and relax. Place your arms palms facing down by the side of you.

As you inhale slowly lift the hips off the floor, pushing through your feet. In unison with this movement bring both your arms over your head to lie above you. By the time you have inhaled fully your arms will be fully extended on the ground above your head and your hips will be up, and your back arched.

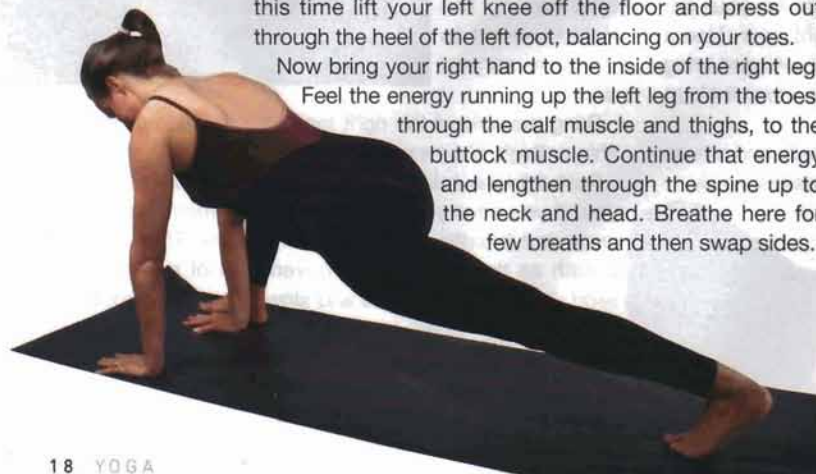
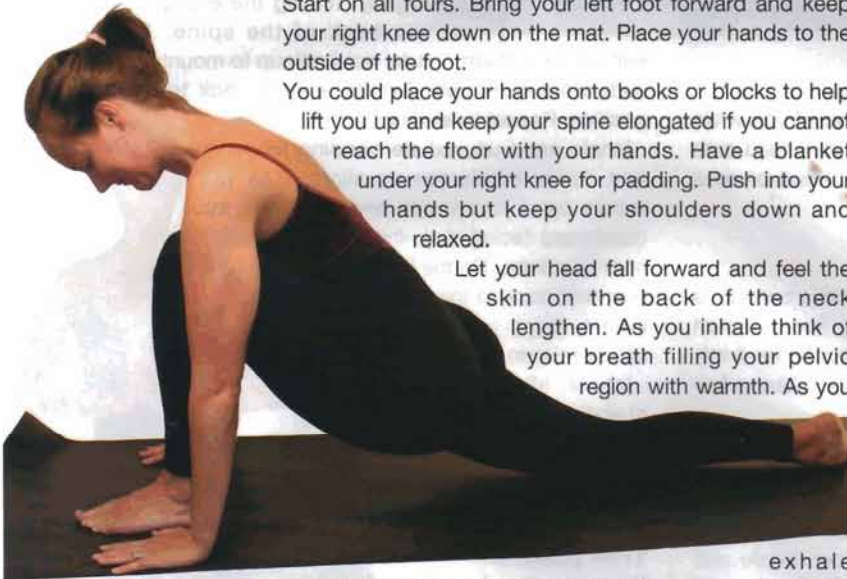
As you exhale release the hips slowly back down to the floor and bring your arms back down by your sides back to the starting position. Keep the knees from falling apart.

Practice this for a few minutes increasing t h e



length of each breath over time. You may begin to notice the separation of each spinal vertebra as you gracefully move up and down. After approximately ten repetitions, stay up in bridge on the last inhale. Push the feet firmly into the floor. Lift through your arches. Keep the buttocks soft and lengthen the spine with every inhale. Bring the arms to the side. Press through the palms of the hands and roll your shoulders underneath you.

Stay here for a couple of breaths. To come out of the pose un-tuck your shoulders, and come up onto your toes. On a big exhale gently lower back down to the floor,





feeling the spine connect to the earth. Once down stay here for a few breaths to settle the spine. Roll to your right hand side to come up.

### Forward bend (Paschimottasana)

Sit on the floor with your legs straight and hip width apart. Pull out the fleshy part of your buttocks so that you are on the tips of your sitting bones. Place your fingertips on the floor beside you. Roll your thighs in to energize the legs and make the kneecaps face the ceiling. Lift your toes forward extending the heels away and press the legs into the earth. If the back of your knee is touching the ground or your heels are off the floor, then you are overextending your ligaments at the back of the knee. Try to lift the thigh up to help keep the pose active but relaxed.

Inhale and lift the upper body up and feel the extension in the inhale. On the exhale bring your hands to your legs. Clasp wherever you can, your thighs, your shins maybe the sides of your feet. On the next inhalation feel the whole back elongate with the breath. As you exhale fold forward keeping the length in the spine. Come forward from the chest not the neck as if your heart is bowing to your whole body. Only go as far as you can. Relax the head down and feel the stretch on the back of the neck.

Keep the shoulders away from the ears. Breathe smoothly feeling your body gently ripple and sigh with the movement of the breath. Stay here for as long as you feel is right. To come up bring the hands back to the side of your body and on a good inhale slowly sit back up.

### Reclining twist (Supta Parivartanasana)

Lie on your back with your knees on your chest. Bring your arms out to the side from your shoulders with your palms facing down. On a good exhale bring both knees over to the right. Let your head roll to the left. Let your body sink into the floor with each exhale. After a minute bring your knees back up to centre on an inhale. Repeat the twist on the other side.

### Corpse pose (Savasana)

Lie on your back with your legs straight and your feet flopped out to the sides. A rolled up blanket can be placed underneath your knees to help the pelvic area melt into the floor. Let your arms lie freely by your side palms facing up.



Close your eyes and let your awareness begin to grow inside of you. Know that as you release yourself to the earth your baby will join you in relaxing.

Begin to look at your breathing and as you exhale, relax and release each part of the body in turn, feeling a warmth travelling through you as you release. Start with the toes and feet, letting the legs be heavy. Then loosen the pelvis, soften the stomach, keep the ribs open. Feel your fingers warming, keep the wrists pliable and the arms like jelly. Your shoulders will sink further down and your jaw will unhinge. Your whole body from the toes to the skull will fall into the earth. Once you have reached every part of your own body bring your awareness to your baby and feel their peacefulness at this time.

Rest here for five to fifteen minutes. To come out of this pose, begin to inhale deeper to bring yourself back to the present environment. Wiggle the fingers and toes. Roll over slowly to your right hand side and rest here for a moment. When you feel ready slowly push and come up to sitting. Namaste.

This session will take an hour to an hour and a half depending how long you hold the poses. Keep mindful of your body and how it moves into each posture. Come to be aware of your breath and how it sustains life through its passage.

You yourself, like the breath, with every movement and beat of your heart, sustain another life also. This is a truly wonderful time that should be enjoyed as well as understood.

### Finding a class

To find a dedicated yoga class for your pregnancy contact the British Wheel of Yoga on 01529 306 851 or visit the website at [www.bwy.org.uk](http://www.bwy.org.uk)

### Points to remember if you are pregnant

- If you are taking classes, let your teacher know that you are pregnant
- Classes can be a great way to meet other mums to be
- Don't do postures that compress the abdomen, require inversion (eg headstand) or that involve breath retention
- Yoga will help ease both your pregnancy and labour, and helps foster a positive attitude towards your body and your baby
- If you are new to yoga it's best not to start during the first trimester, and if at any point you feel fatigued or uncomfortable, stop