

# Yoga AND Pregnancy

**Sally Parkes** is founder of Sally Parkes Yoga and runs fully certified Teacher Training programmes in both Vinyasa Flow and Pregnancy Yoga. She runs retreats and is an ambassador for Urban Lucy Clothing and is a health and fitness writer based in London and West Sussex.

By **Sally Parkes** [www.sallyparkesyoga.com](http://www.sallyparkesyoga.com) Photography: [www.aliwphotography.co.uk](http://www.aliwphotography.co.uk)

**P**regnancy and childbirth is the largest emotional and physical change that a woman's body will undergo. It's a time when we become more aware of the workings of our body. As the baby grows in the womb, the extra weight results in an altered centre of gravity and postural changes which can lead to a variety of aches and pains including lower back and pelvic. Many women find however, that with the regular practice of gentle Hatha Yoga and breathing exercises, their body becomes more balanced and there is less pain and more strength that helps to support the body whilst carrying the baby. Muscle tension is also stretched away, leading to a calmer mind and improved sleep.

The holistic approach of yoga can also help to bring about balance of the ever changing hormonal system as well as reduce common ailments such as morning sickness, heartburn, slower than normal digestion, fluid retention and muscle cramps. When the body functions at a more optimal level it allows time for mums-to-be to harness their physical energy whilst bonding with her baby. Additionally, it's now recognised that there are many benefits if the expectant mother can move freely during the birthing process. Upright positions may reduce pain and help contractions be more effective as well as increasing the blood supply to the baby. And the downward force of gravity

when in a squat or wide leg pelvic position makes for an easier and faster delivery time. The challenge for the mother however, is gaining and maintaining the strength and stamina to hold such positions and this is where the practice of yoga asana (postures) is very beneficial. Appropriate yoga breathing exercises (pranayama) can also be used to increase mental focus and to reduce discomfort, especially during contractions. Ujjayi breathing, also known as the 'Victorious Breath', is known to be particularly useful during labour whilst Nadi Shodhana or Alternate Nostril Breathing is useful during pregnancy.

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When beginning the practice of Hatha Yoga

in pregnancy it's useful to always remember that every pregnancy is different and so what may suit one mother may not suit another. Lying flat on the back after thirty weeks should be avoided as should lying on your front when this becomes uncomfortable. Also be aware of overstretching as a hormone called relaxin is produced during pregnancy which helps the body to stretch and allows room for the baby, but can also leave the joints more prone to injury. Because of this, asanas involving strong back bends should be avoided as the lower back is much more vulnerable due to instability during pregnancy and is already slightly compressed in the lumbar region. The focus should be more on chest and shoulder opening postures as this area often carries extra tension. The hips and lower back also need gentle stretching to encourage healthy mobility as well as strength work to keep the joints stable.

In addition to these physical benefits, yoga can teach us to be strong enough to mentally 'let go' and encourage us to go with the flow. It helps us to realise we cannot control everything and prepares us for the unexpected, allowing us to adapt to unforeseen situations. These skills can be applied at any time of life but are especially effective during pregnancy and birth and leaves us with more space to enjoy the journey into motherhood.

## Pregnancy Yoga Sequence 1 – Sun Salute

### Tadasana: Mountain Pose

Stand with the feet hip-width apart and the knees a little bent with the pelvis tucked under very slightly. Bring the hands into prayer position with the chin parallel to the floor and the face and shoulders relaxed.



### Standing Twist:

Now separate the hands with palms facing forwards and rotate to the right side as you exhale. Inhale and return to the centre and rotate to the left side as you exhale. The twist should come predominately from the thoracic region (middle spine) but do allow the pelvis to rotate as well to prevent strain on the lumbar (lower) spine.



### Hindi Squat: Low Squat

Inhale back to the start position, bend the knees deeply and lower down into a low squat as you exhale. Pause for two or three breaths. The hands can be in prayer position or on the ground in front of the hips for additional support. Keep the spine as upright as possible.

**NB: If the heels lift from the floor during the squat, place yoga blocks or similar under the heels. This will help to minimise any stress on the knee joint.**

## Swooping forwards:

Now move into a box position and as you inhale bend the elbows as you swoop forwards keeping the elbows in-line and close to the rib cage to engage the triceps efficiently. The arms are now working strongly. Press firmly into the hands to straighten the arms and move the hips back towards the heels. This is done on an exhale.

Repeat five times  
and maintain a sense  
of a flowing rhythm  
throughout.



## Hindi Squat: Low Squat

Now move the hands back towards the knees and move into a low squat again. Pause and breath and then slowly come up to standing by pressing firmly into the feet and straightening the legs. The spine stays straight throughout. Return to your start position - Tadasana



## Pregnancy Yoga Sequence 2 – Goddess Flow

### Wide Leg Tadasana:

From a basic Mountain Pose step the feet out wide with the toes pointing forwards and press the hands together in prayer position. The pelvis is just slightly tucked under to help elongate the sacrum area.

### Goddess Squat/Pose:

Now bend the knees so the legs start to work more strongly. Press firmly into the feet to encourage a sense of stability. The knees should be aligned over the ankles. Maintain a neutral spine and a constant even breathing pattern.



### Goddess Pose:

Now reach the arms out to either side and lift the gaze. Keep the feeling of strength through the legs and length through the spine. Gently contract the abdominal muscles so it feels like the core muscles are hugging your baby into towards you.



### Goddess Pose with Side Bend:

Now lightly rest the right forearm onto the right thigh and reach the left arm up and over until the spine is in a lateral flexion (side bend) position. You should feel the stretch in the left side of the rib cage. Hold for three to five breaths and repeat on the other side, again holding for three to five breaths.



### Goddess Pose:

Now bring the upper body back to the centre and extend the arms gently out to either side with the elbows a little bent. Draw the shoulder blades down away from the ears. The legs should feel fatigued at this point.



Exhale as your return to Wide Leg Tadasana and then gradually bring the feet back towards one another before relaxing the arms by your sides. Take five deep, slow breaths to recover and help the heart rate return back to normal.

