

The BENEFITS of PRENATAL YOGA

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STRETCH – basic postures that develop flexibility and strength

BREATHE – deep full breathing that brings a sense of peace

RELAX – movements that promote deep relaxation

MEDITATE – techniques to calm and center the mind

Yoga is an ancient (at least 5,000 years old), discipline used to maintain physical and psychological well being. The underlying purpose of all the different aspects of practicing yoga is to reunite our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual faculties with the Divine, or universal consciousness. Yoga is not a religion, although many people practice it in a spiritual manner. Rather, through the experience of quieting the mind and the body, we come to sense the interdependent web of all existence and our place in that web.

Yoga has the power to bring your whole body into balance. Prenatal yoga provides movements, breathwork, relaxation methods and meditation selected to physically, spiritually and emotionally prepare the pregnant woman for the changes that happen during the childbearing year. As our awareness turns within, we can deepen our connection to our self, as well as to the baby growing inside.

The Gifts of Yoga

Maintaining a regular practice can bring us to an increased awareness of the body, a deep sense of inner peace and relaxation, and a greater mental alertness. Simply observing the sensations of the body in a non-judgmental way teaches the pregnant woman how to clearly perceive what she is feeling. She can develop an authentic sense of being 'at one' with herself, and her baby, thus allowing her to experience her birth from a place of inner power. Making time to nurture herself and her baby through a yoga practice sets a priority that can carry over into the busy days of caring for a baby. Many women do not make the time to care for themselves, and thus deplete themselves unnecessarily. So remember, when you take care of yourself, you have more to give to others.

Many people begin the practice of yoga in order to relax and become more flexible. Yoga can do that, and so much more! When we become aware of where we carry tension in the body, through the practice of yoga postures, we can learn to stretch into those places, and release those pockets of tension. As a result, many students experience better sleep, increased energy and less stress related illnesses. Flexibility is increased, and therefore the body experiences less stiffness and a greater range of motion. For pregnant women, experiencing the balance between the focus of holding a posture and surrendering to the flow of the posture, can be carried over to the experience of the focus and surrender required during and between contractions. A very positive side effect is that many women require

less pain medication, which is, under most circumstances the optimal situation.

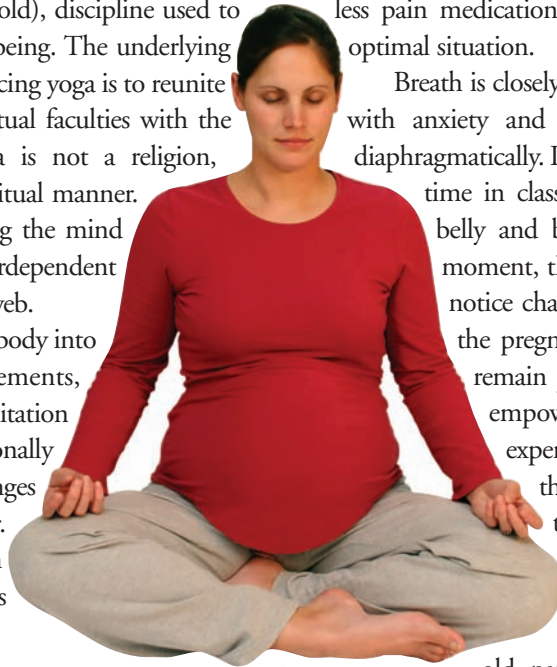
Breath is closely associated with feeling, which is why those with anxiety and panic symptoms are taught to breathe diaphragmatically. It is the breath that brings peace. As we spend time in class practicing "being present," softening the belly and bringing our consciousness to the present moment, the body-mind slows down and we begin to notice changes in how we feel in day-to-day life. For the pregnant woman, this practice can assist her to remain present during her labor and delivery, thus empowering her to have a full and positive experience of her labor. She learns to breathe into the sensations of the body, rather than trying to avoid them.

When she learns yogic relaxation techniques that calm the mind, and greatly reduce tension, she is better able to release old patterns of thinking and coping with life's experiences, and to use the experience of the present moment to determine her reactions to what is happening in her body both during pregnancy and during labor.

Meditation brings us to a fuller awareness of ourselves. We learn to watch what comes through the mind as thoughts and then let them pass out of the mind without reacting to them. This is the great gift of meditation, that we don't have to "become" our feelings, getting lost in them. We then can come to a place of trusting ourselves on a deeper level. For the pregnant woman, this is the greatest gift of all, because when she trusts her body to bring forth her baby as it instinctively knows how to do, she is in the best position to have a rewarding and fulfilling labor and delivery experience.

All of these benefits are extremely accessible to the pregnant woman who participates in a yoga practice because her body 'knows' them from experience, rather than from reading about them in a book. When she enters labor, she brings with her the knowledge to assist her body, and the techniques flow naturally into her consciousness.

Prenatal yoga classes are offered through the Childbirth Education program at Elliot Health System. Call 663-4567 or visit the Programs and Classes link at www.elliospital.org, for more information.



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