



## Yoga and Your Baby Cassandra Yasko

Over the years, yoga has become a more mainstream choice for exercise, wellbeing, and spiritual alignment. It is now common knowledge that yoga is beneficial to the physical, spiritual, and mental balance of a human being. People focused on varying interests have started to implement yoga into their daily lives. For example, some football teams are practicing yoga for cross training, professional dancers are mixing in yoga to balance out the intensity of their job, it seems as though more adults than ever before are participating in yoga classes across the globe, and teenagers are developing a greater interest for the opportunity of reaching peace of mind through yoga. Furthermore, some school systems are recognizing the positive effects of yoga by choosing to change their traditional approach toward disciplinary actions, replacing detention with meditation/yoga time-blocks. With all this excitement over yoga, it is easy to understand why moms-to-be are encouraged to develop a consistent yoga practice during their pregnancy.

The journey into motherhood can be an exciting, stressful, anxiety ridden, thrilling ride. While balancing all of her changing hormones and physical body ailments that occur alongside the joy of experiencing pregnancy, mom-to-be deserves some dedicated “me time” to reach a calm baselevel. This internal peace can guide her through the 9 months of pregnancy, hours of labor, and years to come of learning how to become the mother she feels her children deserve. Many healthcare professionals are starting to acknowledge the positive nature of yoga, understanding how it can support a mother’s mental health, physical comfort throughout pregnancy, strength building capabilities, and several other factors. As such, some doctors are suggesting yoga as a safe form of exercise for their patients to practice:

*“Ten randomized controlled trials were evaluated. The findings consistently indicate that yoga intervention presented with lower incidences of prenatal disorders, and small gestational age, lower levels of pain and stress, and higher score of relationship. In addition, yoga can be safely used for pregnant women who are depressed, at high-risk, or experience lumbopelvic pain. Moreover, yoga is a more effective exercise than walking or standard prenatal exercises,”* (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25535930/>)

In theme with focusing on the mother’s health, we can attest to the fact that if a mother is happy and healthy, her baby will also respond in such a manner. It is common knowledge that if any person is under perpetual stress, anxiety, or other negative factors, their health and wellbeing will decrease. We can transfer this knowledge to pregnancy, if a mother is not healthy, her baby will also suffer. Within her Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training, Ryah Dekis wrote: *“The health of the baby is directly affected by the health and wellbeing of its mother. A combination of self-care practices meant to support, ground, and nourish the mother, are all an essential part of this process.”* What’s more, there are scientific studies that provide factual evidence of this statement: *“It’s probably not surprising that research has confirmed a healthy mama is more likely to have a healthy baby. In fact, a 2012 study found that women who regularly practiced yoga during pregnancy were less likely to have preterm labor or to deliver a low-birthweight baby,”* (<https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/my-body/fitness/prenatal-yoga-benefits/>). To that end, we can confidently suggest that yoga not only assists the mother, but her baby as well. Several scientific-based studies demonstrate the positive affects yoga has on the mom-to-be. As such, one could conclude that since yoga is helping mom-to-



be, it is also supporting the growing child within her. For example, a range of articles provide supporting research that show a newborn's weight was healthier when the mother practiced yoga: *"The number of low birth weight babies was also significantly less in the study group. There were no adverse effects attributed to yoga...The study has highlighted that yoga is a noninvasive, easy to learn mind-body medicine and complementary health practice, effective in alleviation of labor pain and possibly improving birth outcome,"* (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30160530/>). To that end, we can safely assume that yoga supports the baby's experience inside the womb along its journey into the world.

Furthermore, since research has documented that yoga can assist mom-to-be in committing to a natural labor, her newborn can potentially be brought into the world without chemical inducement: *"This meta-analysis identified that yoga improved vaginal delivery, decreased premature delivery and birth weight of newborns, shorten the labor duration...Prenatal yoga is an effective complementary medicine to improve delivery outcomes and not to increase the risk of fetus, which is worth recommending to pregnant women,"* (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1744388119308503>). While many of the side effects from pain medications or other medical interventions are merely temporary, a baby will still experience some disorientation after birth if the mother chooses to have a medicated labor. As such, we can attribute a (potentially) positive natural birth experience to a dedicated yoga practice during pregnancy. In her book focused on implementing yoga into pregnancy and throughout labor, Dorothy Guerra says: *"Making the choice to birth naturally has many benefits for you and your baby, such as the ability to move during contractions, being able to feel yourself pushing, and being able to get up and walk after birth; also, your baby will be more alert at birth and will be more likely to breastfeed easier; the list can go on and on,"* (Yoga Birth Method).

One element in particular that is truly interesting involves a study focused on high-risk pregnancies and yoga. It can be difficult if a mother is considered high-risk, stress levels may increase due to concern for her baby along with frustration and impatience due to restricted physical activities. In the following study, 59 high-risk pregnant women were separated into yoga and control groups. This quote demonstrates how their high-risk pregnancies were supported by yoga, specifically related to the effects on the growing fetus:

*"Previous studies have shown the benefits of yoga in improving pregnancy outcomes and those of yogic visualization in revitalizing the human tissues...The yoga group received standard care plus yoga sessions (1 hour/day, 3 times/week), from 12th to 28th week of gestation. The control group received standard care plus conventional antenatal exercises (walking). Measurements were assessed at 12th, 20th, and 28th weeks of gestation...RM-ANOVA showed significantly higher values in the yoga group for biparietal diameter, head circumference, femur length, and estimated fetal weight. The resistance index in the right uterine artery, umbilical artery, and fetal middle cerebral artery showed significantly lower impedance in the yoga group...The results of this first randomized study of yoga in high-risk pregnancy suggest that guided yogic practices and visualization can improve the intrauterine fetal growth and the utero-fetal-placental circulation,"* (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25688304/>).

Yoga is not only safe for high-risk pregnancies, it has clearly been proven that yoga can actually improve the wellbeing of the growing baby. This research can alleviate some of the anxiety



associated with a mom who is experiencing a high-risk pregnancy. Knowing that she can safely practice yoga for movement, mental alignment, and physical strength will support the flow of positive endorphins. What's more, mom-to-be can be comforted by the possibility that her baby will develop strong and healthy.

Lastly, yoga can also be thought of as a type of movement meditation or, at the very least, Savasana at the end of class can provide a mediation practice for mom-to-be. Within Ryah Dekis's Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training Manual, she states that:

*"A paper from The Buddhist Institute of Enlightenment, meanwhile, states that beyond facilitating the mother's health, meditation can also promote pregnancy health and ultimately affect infant behavior. The study carried out at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Hong Kong, involved 64 pregnant Chinese women who were recruited for intervention and 59 who were used as a control group. Several measurements including cord blood cortisol and infant salivary cortisol indicated the positive health status of newborns from the intervention group, displaying that prenatal meditation could influence fetal health. Infants from the intervention group also showed a better temperament at 5 months old."*

Since we have supporting research on the positive influences of meditation, we can correlate these findings to connect a parallel result from practicing yoga. This study specifically states that a concentrated relationship with mind and body through meditation not only supports fetal health, but it also influences the growing child demonstrating better temperament at 5 months old. If more research was conducted in relation to the mother's commitment to yoga/meditation in conjunction with the temperament, mood, stress levels, and behavioral patterns of her child, we would most likely be presented with a larger offering of scientific based facts filled with positive results.

Regardless of these un-knowns, it is clear that yoga plays a dominate role in a woman's pregnancy experience. By practicing prenatal yoga, mom-to-be can rediscover her sense of self, find a calmness within, work on her physical balance and strength capabilities, and source mental clarity. When making time for herself, mom-to-be is better able to serve her baby within and later, is able to support her newborn with greater ease. As Ryah Dekis has so beautifully stated: *"Emotions and space are closely interrelated. Joy expands the heart. When in love, for example, we feel light, as if we had wings, we feel immense, full of energy, the world is our oyster. It is this state of happiness and inner expansion which is good to cultivate and transmit to the baby, so that the powerful joy of living is engraved lastingly in his cells."* And so, mothers can dive into a yoga practice and the age-old principals, exploring the theories and applying them to her daily life. She can take all of these empowering elements of yoga with her during labor and throughout motherhood, transferring this amazing resource to her baby during its journey from inside the womb and into the world.