

pregnancy & new baby

# practising yoga during pregnancy

By Jo Hogan\*

**Before and after the birth of a baby, yoga can be very effective in getting the body and the mind in shape.**

Pregnancy is a joyful time for most mums-to-be, although it can bring with it not only physical discomforts, but also a certain amount of anxiety and tension. Unlike other forms of exercise, yoga is truly a holistic practice which takes into account the physical body, as well as thoughts and emotions.

**A pre-natal yoga class is specifically designed for the pregnant body and will generally include:**

- Yoga postures and stretches (also known as asana) to increase your flexibility, strength and stamina – preparing your body for birth and parenthood, as well as easing pregnancy aches and discomforts.
- Breathing exercises to calm and centre the mind during your labour.
- Deep relaxation and visualisation techniques that reduce tension and stress both in the body and mind – an invaluable aide for pregnancy and parenthood!

The classes also provide a safe and supportive space where pregnant women can share their experiences with each other, and learn the skills that will allow them to remain

present and become an active participant in the miracle that is the birth process.

Gentle stretching in the first trimester is fine but avoid strong abdominals or back bends. And most pregnancy yoga teachers advise that you wait until your second trimester before commencing yoga. During pregnancy you can be extra bendy, so never force or strain. Ideally a small amount of yoga (15-20 minutes) done every day will give you the maximum benefits. This could include a weekly class and/or the use of DVDs, yoga charts or books at home.\*\*

Postnatal (mum and baby) yoga is also great fun and has many benefits. It's best to wait until your six-week check from your midwife before starting and then look out for a local class or find a book that teaches you how you can practise with your baby.

*\* Jo Hogan owns Bella Mama, an Auckland-based company that specialises in nurturing mothers throughout pregnancy, birth and motherhood with specialist massage treatments, yoga classes and retreats. For yoga charts and more information, visit [www.bellamama.co.nz](http://www.bellamama.co.nz)*

*\*\* Recommended book: 'Baby Om, yoga for mothers and babies' by Laura Stanton and Sarah Perron, published by Saint Martin's Press Inc. Available at [www.fishpond.co.nz](http://www.fishpond.co.nz).*

