

10 Prenatal Poses You Should Do Everyday

By Jeanna Lurie, RYT, CCE, CLA

As a Prenatal Yoga teacher, I am frequently asked what poses my students should practice at home. Following is a core set of poses and exercises we do in nearly every class. They can be practiced in as little as 10 minutes or lengthened for a longer practice. Each pose is beneficial for a more comfortable pregnancy and can prepare you to better cope with the athletic event of labor. Most can even be done in labor! Please remember to listen to your body and exercise caution when practicing.

1. Sitting Meditation: rock your baby w/ your breath

“Tailor” sit on the floor on a cushion or folded blanket so that your hips are slightly above your knees. Inhale and lengthen your spine, exhale and relax your shoulders and anything else that is tense. Use your breath as a focal point, bringing your attention back to it every time your mind wanders. Place your hands on your belly and welcome the moment to connect with your baby. Take seven fully aware, slow, deep, abdominal breaths, feeling the breath rock your baby gently back and forth. Close the meditation by bringing your hands into anjali mudra (prayer pose) and connecting yourself and your baby with an opening, accepting, non-judgmental heart.

2. Marjaryasana/ Bitilasana (cat/ cow)



Place your hands on the floor, in line with your shoulders, spread your fingers wide and press your fingertips and knuckles into the floor so that you are not sinking into your wrists and you feel the muscles in your arms engage. Lengthen your spine, sending your sacrum back and the crown of your head forward. You may enjoy the mantra “there is plenty of space for me and my baby.” Letting your pelvis lead the movement, exhale into cat, then follow your inhalation into cow. Continue, synchronizing the breath with the movement.

3. Adho Mukha Svanasana (dog pose)

From Bitilasana, exhale into Adho Mukha Svanasana, raising your hips towards the sky and extending the upper half of your body as much as possible. Continue to press your fingertips and knuckle into the mat, lifting out of your wrists and engaging your arm muscles. It’s okay if your hamstrings are tight- allow your knees to bend.



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You can slowly work towards stretching and straightening your legs and bringing your heels towards the floor.

This is a chance to practice mindfulness- notice what your mind is doing- perhaps telling you it is too hard or wondering when to come down or even what you need to pick up from the grocery store. Notice it and bring your focus back to the breath. Exhale down when your body naturally does so, not when your mind tells you to. Make peace with any of the physical challenge before exiting the pose.

4. Balasana (child's pose)



From dog pose, exhale down into Balasana. Open your knees as wide as you need to, to accommodate your belly, and bring your sacrum towards your heels. Totally let go, sinking into the floor. If you are not 100% comfortable, hug a bolster or a pillow under your chest.

Feel free to repeat dog pose and child's pose a few times.

5. Malasana (squatting) with "diamonds"*

From child's pose, inhale back to hands and knees, keeping your knees wide. Tuck your toes under and press back into Malasana. Open your feet as wide as you need to so that your heels are flat on the floor. If you cannot get your heels down no matter how wide your feet are, then roll up a blanket or use a cushion to place under your heels so that you are not balancing on your toes.



Without holding your breath, lift the diamond-shaped muscles of your pelvic floor- the perineum (the space between the vagina and anus) is the center of your diamond. See how tight you can hold it. Take a breath and let it out. Make sure you completely relax between each diamond. Repeat.

*For more information on "diamonds" please see work by Leslie Howard (www.lesliehowardyoga.com).

6. Tadasana (mountain pose)



From Malasana, press up into standing. Start with your feet pointing forward, directly underneath your hip joints. Spread your toes wide and stack your knees over your ankles, your hips over your knees, and your shoulders over your hips. Pay special attention to your pelvis- most people stand with the weight of their pelvis too far forward over the balls of the feet, especially during pregnancy. If you are not used to getting your weight over your ankles, you may feel like you are falling backwards. Lengthen your sacrum down and your spine up. Relax your shoulders and let your chest open. Your posture is very important, on and off the mat, during pregnancy and after...check it daily.

7. Utkatasana (powerful pose- "chair pose")

With your feet lined up with the outer edges of your hips, inhale your arms from Anjali mudra to overhead. Exhale bending your knees and sinking into Utkatasana. Make sure your weight is in your heels- if the pose feels easy and your thighs are not working hard, you probably have your weight in the balls of your feet. Focus on your breath or try chanting om for about a minute. Use the mantra "I can do anything for one minute!" And you can- a hard yoga pose, a contraction, rocking a crying baby...just take it one minute at a time!

8. Modified Natarajasana (dancer pose)

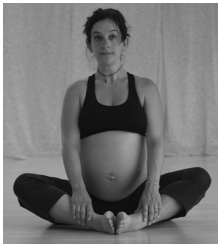
From tadasana, transfer your weight onto one foot, maintaining the alignment of your knee, hip, and shoulder over the ankle of the supporting leg. Grab your other foot behind you, stretching your thigh in the process. If it's comfortable, use both hands to grab your foot, opening your chest with a lifted breastbone and sliding the shoulder blades down your back. Remember that balance comes from our center, so hug your baby with your abs. Rebuild your tadasana and check your postural alignment before repeating on the second side.

9. Hula Hips

Widen your feet to the outer edges of your hips, bend your knees and circle your hips and pelvis a few times, changing directions halfway through. You can also try making a figure eight with your hips.



10. Badha Konasana (bound angle pose)



Returning to the floor, sit with the soles of your feet together, knees dropping comfortably towards the floor. If lengthening your spine in this position is a challenge, sit on a blanket or cushion. Inhale lengthening and exhale bending forward from the hips, going forward only as far as you can while maintaining an open chest. Release into the pose for a few breaths, then inhale lengthening back up.

11. Modified Sivasana (restorative pose)

Depending on your own comforts, surrender in a restorative pose as follows:

Sivasana

Lie on your back, arms at your sides, palms facing up. You may put a bolster or a rolled blanket under your knees to support your lower back. **DO NOT** do this pose if you feel short of breath, dizzy, or light headed, or any other discomfort.

"Queen's Pose"

Place two blocks in an "L" shape on the floor as support for a bolster. Sit with your back scooted all the way up to the bolster, then recline onto the bolster. Place the soles of your feet together, knees falling comfortably to the floor (Supta Bodha Konasana) or put a bolster under your knees.



Supported Side-Lying

Place a bolster or pillows on the floor and lie down on your side facing them. Hug the bolster with your upper arm and bend your upper leg and rest it on the bolster as well. Turn slightly towards the floor so you are not resting squarely on your hip. Rest your head on a cushion.

No matter which restorative pose you choose, draw your senses inward and become an observer of your own body. If you find your mind wandering to things that don't have anything to do with the present moment, just notice it and bring your focus back to the breath. Do this as many times as you need to. End with your hands on your belly breathing a connection between your baby and your heart center. Envision a cord, a vine, a beam of light or anything else that comes to you as a representation of your connection. Hold on to this connection as your body awakens and you end your meditation.