



Prenatal Yoga for Stress Reduction

Goals:

- Reduce stress, relax, cultivate self-possession and tranquility and restore equilibrium.

Audience:

- Pregnant women, no experience necessary.

Supplies Needed:

None

Length of Time to Complete:

10 – 15 minutes

Background:

One of the best things we can do for our babies is let them know that they're entering a world where they'll be safe and protected. When stress overwhelms you, the quickest, most sure-fire way to eliminate the anxiety is to tune into the breath and slow it down. When we breathe deeply and slowly, we reduce the heart rate and this in turn steadies and balances the mind.

Pranayama is an ancient practice of working with the vital life force, the **breath**. By practicing breathing exercises that utilize the entire lung capacity, we can restore even mindedness and balance, protecting ourselves and our babies from the harmful effects of stress.

Exercise 1 – Pranayama:

1. To begin, come into a cross legged position and make sure you're sitting up nice and tall. Plug the seat bones into the earth and then lengthen your spine towards the ceiling. Slightly tuck the chin so that the neck is long.
2. Rest the hands on the knees, palms down.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Take your attention to your breath. Don't try to alter it yet, just be mindful of it.
5. Place one hand on the abdomen, the other on your heart.
6. Inhale deeply, initiating the breath deep in the abdomen, letting it fill the lungs and then the chest. Exhale from the abdomen first so that the chest is last to drop. (Guide students through this several times.)
7. Continue with your full yogic breath at your own pace (2 min).
8. Relax the face.
9. Feel the rise and fall of the torso.
10. With every inhale, breathe in light and life and energy.
11. With each exhale, let go of all that you can't control.
12. When you're ready, bring your hands together into Anjali Mudra, prayer at heart center, representing union – union between body and mind, breath and movement and you and you're baby.

Exercise 2 – Shoulder Openers

1. On inhale, lift arms out to sides so that they're in line with the shoulders.
2. Visualize a shelf just under the arms and imagine pressing down into that shelf. This helps you engage and strengthen the biceps.

3. Keeping the seat planted into the earth, take the ribs from side to side, each time lengthening through the spine and sitting up a little taller.
4. Once you're finished lengthening through the spine, come back center and turn the palms up to the sky.
5. Reach from the sides of the ribs as you draw the arms up to the ceiling.
6. Hook your thumbs together and then work against that bind, as if you're trying to break it. Notice that as you try to pull the thumbs apart, the tops of the shoulders relax.
7. Draw the outer upper arms in towards the face. Soften through the neck and the face. Soften the ribs.
8. On your next exhale, release the arms down by your side.
9. Grab opposite shoulders, right elbow on top of left. Lift the elbows up the ceiling and draw the shoulders away from the ears. Repeat with the left elbow on top.
10. Release the arms down by your sides.
11. Repeat 2 or 3 times.

Exercise 3 – Balasana (Child's Pose)

1. From your comfortable cross-legged position (sukhasana), roll forward coming onto the hands and knees. Make sure that the hands are directly under the shoulders.
2. Take the toes together and the knees wide.
3. Keep the hands plugged into the earth as you release the seat to the heels and bring the forehead to the earth.
4. Walk the hands out and away from the body until they're extended completely. Press into the ball of the hands and see if you can drop the seat further towards the earth, opening up through the hips.
5. On the inhale, feel the stretch work its way up the back.
6. On the exhale, see if you can release deeper into the hips.
7. If you like, you can roll the head from side to side, gently massaging the forehead.
8. Take your attention to the back of the head, where the neck and the head meet. If you're holding onto the any tension there, imagine it melting away and falling to the forehead where it empties into the earth.
9. When you're ready, roll up so that you're sitting on your heels. Stay here or return to your comfortable cross-legged position.

Exercise 4 - Closing:

1. As you sit comfortably with the eyes closed, breathe deeply.
 2. Bring one hand to your baby the other to your heart. With every breath, let your baby feel your love. Use your breath to tell your little one that she's safe, cherished and protected.
 3. Take the hands together into prayer at heart center. Take a moment to thank the universe for your little one.
- When you're ready, open the eyes.

Resources:

<http://www.pregnancy.org/article/help-stressed-out-moms-works>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/4286512.stm>