

Exercise Your Options: Yoga poses offer graceful way to shape up for childbirth

As students lay out mats for their prenatal yoga class at the Mission Valley YMCA, they joke about how ungainly they look and feel. "A guy in the next car was checking me out," says a woman who is in her eighth month of pregnancy. "If he'd only seen the rest of me!"

Once teacher Sünje O'Clancy guides them into yoga, however, the women are extraordinarily graceful. And they get a workout, doing deep lunges into warrior poses and holding poses for about a minute at a time.

Learning to "maintain a deep, smooth and steady breath (while) holding a physically demanding pose" can help you stay focused through labor and delivery, says O'Clancy, who practiced yoga during her own two pregnancies.

"We do imagery of your breath coming and going like a wave, and women have told me they used that during labor, and it really helped."

Prenatal yoga also addresses health issues that arise during pregnancy, says Liza Janda, who teaches in San Marcos and is also a natural childbirth educator.

"We do a lot of downward dog," Janda says. "It's really good because it gets the uterus up and out of the pelvis, which relieves pressure and helps circulation. And almost every week, somebody requests pigeon pose, because it's amazing in preventing sciatica."

Along with classic (sometimes modified) asanas, prenatal yoga includes exercises specifically intended to prepare the body for giving birth, for instance, pelvic rocking and kegels. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists supports exercising during pregnancy, but of course get your doctor's OK that yoga is right for you

– JANICE STEINBERG

Pregnant Pauses



Liza Janda (left) leads a prenatal yoga class at Blue Raven Yoga in San Marcos. The classes address health issues that arise during pregnancy.

TLC: Yoga is a mind-body-spirit practice, and Janda shares poems and inspiring anecdotes. "I constantly try to give my students the message that they were born to give birth, they have the strength inside of them," she says. Students also support one another. For O'Clancy, "It's really a little community in the class."

Look for: At least a dozen locations in San Diego County offer yoga specifically geared to pregnant women. Ask if the teacher has had prenatal training. Be aware that there are different

styles of yoga, and you may need to shop around to find the right approach for you.

What to avoid: A pregnant woman shouldn't lie flat on her back or stomach, so poses such as bow, cobra and corpse are contraindicated. Twists should be done with the upper body only. Janda and O'Clancy both oppose doing inversions like headstands, but there's disagreement over this issue in the yoga world. Bikram style (hot) yoga raises concerns because of the need to keep the core body temperature down; however, Bikram devotees may find ways to continue their practice.

Cost/equipment: A single class is typically \$10-\$15, but many places offer multi-class packages. If you need (or prefer) to get your own mat, a basic mat costs about \$20.

Contact information: Sünje O'Clancy: Mission Valley YMCA, (619) 298-3576, missionvalley.ymca.org, or A Gentle Way Yoga, La Mesa, (619) 698-1170, gentleway.com.

Liza Janda: yogajanda.com or Blue Raven Yoga and Healing Center, San Marcos, (760) 510-6880, blueravenyoga.com.

For other prenatal classes in San Diego: Yogafinder.com.