



# HAPPIEST HEALTH

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# BE LABOUR READY

*For expecting mothers, yoga can help make for an easier delivery*

BY: DR CHETANA BS

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANANTHA SUBRAMANYAM

“Even on the day of labour, I practised breathing exercises as instructed by my yoga teacher,” says Manjula Venkataraju, 37, an IT professional from Bengaluru recalling her first pregnancy in 2020. After reaching the 10-week mark, she began attending prenatal yoga lessons.

When told that she would likely need a caesarean section due to gestational diabetes, Venkataraju began to worry. However, everyone, including physicians, was amazed when she delivered a healthy baby after a short and normal two-hour labour.

“I was able to manage the contractions and endure the pain very well,” says Venkataraju, who is expecting her second child and continues to practise yoga. Homemaker and Tennessee-resident Akshaya, 35, who believes yoga is a go-to regime for maintaining overall health, has a similar story to share.

The stretches that she practised while performing different postures (*asanas*)

during prenatal yoga classes were helpful in easing the discomfort she faced during her pregnancy. Additionally, the breathing exercises relaxed her mind and eased labour pain. “Prenatal yoga helped me achieve my goal of having a natural childbirth,” says Akshaya, who prefers to

go by her first name only.

Soon-to-be-mother Ashwini Karupakala, 26, who has come from Germany to Bengaluru to be with her in-laws, is another votary of prenatal yoga. Karupakala started practising yoga in her seventh month of pregnancy. After a month’s training, she now feels motivated all day long. “I started yoga to keep myself healthy and fit and look forward to a safe and uncomplicated labour,” she says.

Many seem to have noticed the benefits of prenatal yoga, as it can enhance physical, mental, and emotional well-being during pregnancy.

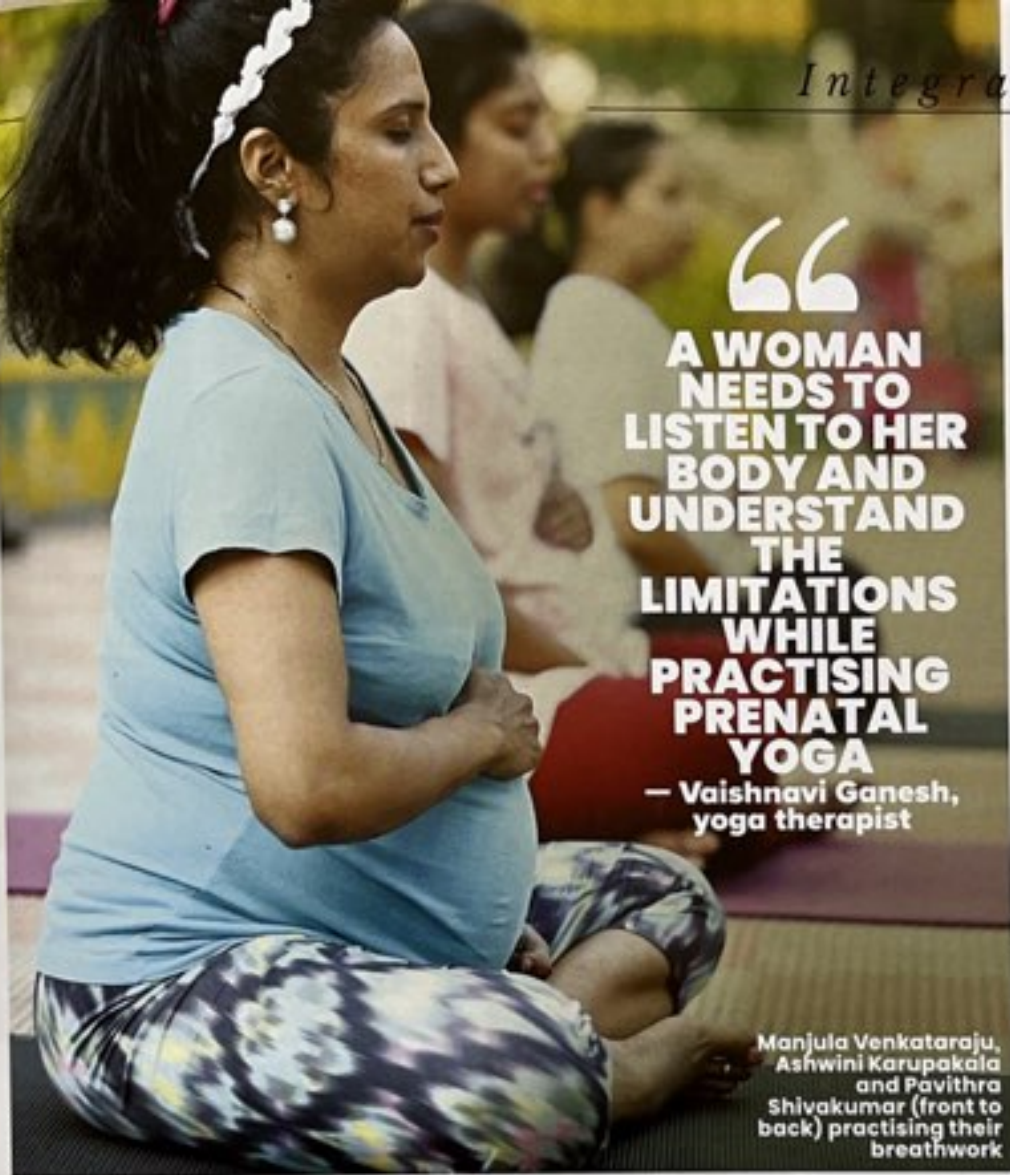
## WHY YOGA?

Pregnancy is a rollercoaster journey for a woman as she undergoes various physical and psychological changes. Yoga entails not only physical postures but also mental and spiritual practices such as breathing exercises and meditation.

Compared to other forms of exercise, yoga is gentler, especially during pregnancy. Prenatal yoga includes



**VAISHNAVI GANESH,**  
yoga therapist, and founder  
of Bloom Prenatal and  
Therapy Yoga, Bengaluru



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YOGA**

— Vaishnavi Ganesh,  
yoga therapist

Manjula Venkataraju,  
Ashwini Karupakala  
and Pavithra  
Shivakumar (front to  
back) practising their  
breathwork

specific poses, deep breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques designed for pregnant women.

The practice usually begins with loosening exercises that are meant to flex the joints and improve blood circulation. This is followed by breathing exercises synchronised with movements and ends with relaxation techniques, explains Vaishnavi Ganesh, yoga therapist and founder of Bloom Prenatal and Therapy Yoga in Bengaluru.

"Prenatal yoga can be tailored to the potential health issues of pregnant women from the date of conception to the date of delivery," adds Kavya Lakshmi, a prenatal yoga therapist from Bengaluru.

### **PREGNANCY EXERCISES**

Dr Astha Dayal, lead consultant, obstetrics and gynaecology at CK Birla Hospital, Gurugram, emphasises the importance of exercise during pregnancy. She says that it keeps a woman comfortable throughout her pregnancy, reduces aches and pains, elevates the mood, aids sleep, and helps correct posture, especially in the last trimester.

Pregnancy yoga is easy for anyone who has practised yoga before conception or played sports regularly. Those who have never tried

yoga or exercise should begin slowly while considering their capacity for exercising.

### **THE RIGHT TIME TO START**

According to Lakshmi, many begin the practice even before planning their pregnancies. Ganesh mentions that one can start from the day of conception, and there are exercises that can be followed even after delivery, i.e., during the post-partum period (postnatal yoga).

### **WHO IS NOT ELIGIBLE**

Dr Dayal says that those who are diagnosed with low-lying placenta (placenta previa), cardiac ailments, severe malnourishment, and those with a history of recurrent miscarriages and twin or triplet pregnancies should refrain from such exercises.

### **THINGS TO TAKE CARE OF**

Dr Dayal recommends starting slow, setting realistic goals, and not exerting pressure on the abdomen, while Lakshmi suggests using props to avoid injuries.

Additionally, Ganesh says that a woman should listen to her body, understand the limitations while practising prenatal yoga, and follow bodily cues.

## **BENEFITS OF PRENATAL YOGA**

Ensures proper  
blood circulation  
throughout the body



Prepares a woman to handle  
symptoms of stress, anxiety,  
and depression in a better way



Improves strength and  
flexibility of the muscles



Improves the sleep cycle



Reduces the duration  
of labour

