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Using the movements and breathing techniques learnt during the classes can encourage the body to relax and open, supporting the labour, speeding up contractions and assisting and facilitating the whole labour process.

Additionally, the recovery after the birth will be better for women who are fit and healthy from a yoga practice throughout their pregnancy. They are less likely to suffer from prolapsed organs, pelvic floor weakness or incontinence and can apply the tools they have learnt for their labour to cope with those exhausting, stressful first months to gain energy and stay calm.

But make sure your instructor is someone that has been trained specifically in yoga for pregnancy. The teacher needs to know all the contraindications for pregnancy. Also when there is a large class the teacher often gets distracted by other students and may not give the student the right attention at the right time. Something that may feel ok at the time may result in injury.

Most importantly, keep an open mind. There is no such thing as an ideal birth. Anything can happen, no matter how prepared you are. Accept whatever turn your birth takes.

Pregnancy is just the beginning of the journey into motherhood. Try not to just focus just on the birth as labour is a stepping stone along the path of transition into your new life as a mother. Some of the challenges you experience during pregnancy are a good way for preparing you for the bigger challenges of motherhood.

It is a good idea to have a plan to resume your exercise after the birth to help get your body back in shape, improve your energy levels and take time out for yourself. For new mothers trying to fit exercise into their busy schedules I would recommend doing some post-natal yoga. This could be at home with a DVD so you can always fit it into your day.

Check out Tara Lee's Yoga for You and Your Baby DVDs, perfect for busy mothers and a chance to spend quality time with your baby whilst also fitting in some yoga.



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Tara Lee is one of the most celebrated yoga teachers in the UK. She teaches Yoga at London's top yoga centre, The Life Centre.

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Great expectations

For many women, pregnancy can be a great first step into yoga, writes Tara Lee

Why do so many women suddenly take up yoga during pregnancy? What are the benefits and does it actually help with labour and post natal recovery? The answer on all counts is 'yes'.

Many women instinctively feel more connected to their bodies during pregnancy and more concerned with looking after themselves now that they have a new life growing inside. This makes it the perfect time to practise yoga. They go to yoga classes thinking that they would like to stretch a little bit, because they have a few aches or pains or because they have been told it will be good for them. They soon discover after a few classes that not only have the aches and pains disappeared, they also feel more energised and have a stronger connection to their babies and their bodies. The stretches help to release tightness and tension from the muscles but the breathing techniques used work on a deeper psychological level to release fears, anxieties and bring a feeling of calmness and clarity to the mind. Insomnia, sciatica, hip pain, rib pain, back ache, SPD (symphysis pubis dysfunction) and headaches and anxieties can be drastically improved or disappear altogether with a regular yoga practice.

Pregnant women may find it easier to get into the state in yoga that many advanced practitioners strive to achieve as there is such a strong inner connection and inner awareness during this time.

Pregnancy yoga classes remind women that they instinctively know how to move their body and to trust and have confidence that their body knows what to do during the birth. That they just have to learn to listen and move accordingly. The classes also offer tools (such as breathing techniques and positions for birth) to use during the labour that help women to feel empowered, in control and to have the right mind set to deal with whatever turn their birthing takes.

A regular yoga practice during pregnancy does not provide any guarantee of a 'natural birth', however. If anything, it makes women realise there is no such thing as the 'perfect birth' but that they can stay calm and open minded and embrace the experience.