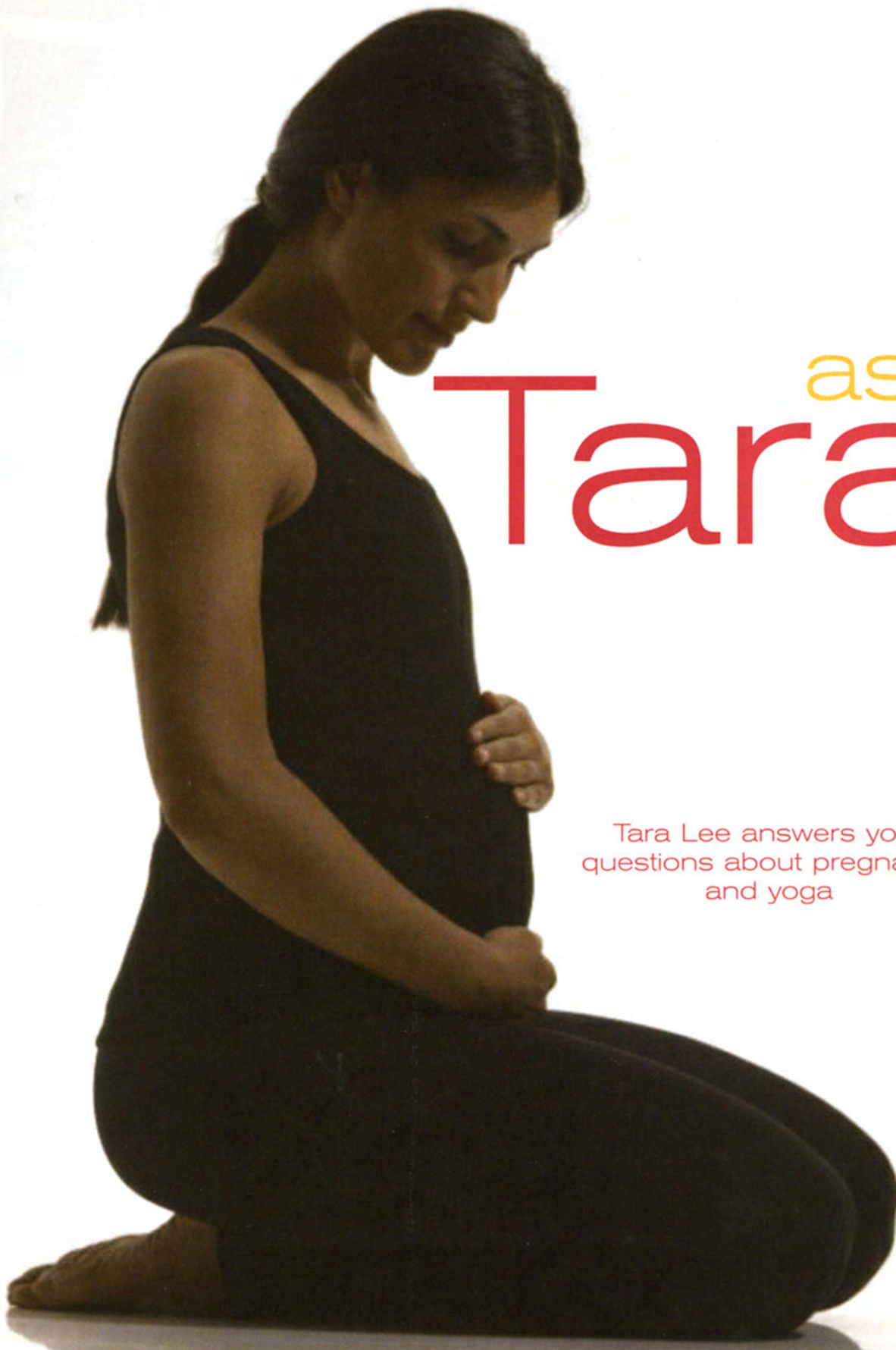


PREGNANCY YOGA



ask
Tara

Tara Lee answers your
questions about pregnancy
and yoga

Dear Tara,

This may sound like a silly question but how does "pregnancy yoga" differ from regular hatha yoga? Surely it's just a matter of being sensible and listening to your body? And shouldn't my yoga teacher tell me if a certain posture was a bad idea, anyway?

Rosie Livornese, London

Tara says:

Hi Rosie,

The Pregnancy yoga I teach varies greatly from regular hatha yoga although of course there are many elements and poses that are the same. There are definite poses to avoid during pregnancy such as strong twists, any poses lying on your tummy which, amongst others can compress the abdomen. You also want to avoid using your stomach muscles and need to widen your legs in forward bends as your bump expands. Towards the end of your pregnancy it is advisable to stop lying on your back too, so certain postures such as the wheel are also better to avoid. Other exercises are included such as specific breathing exercises to prepare you for labour, hip circles on all fours to encourage the baby into an optimum position and loosen up the hips and pelvic floor exercises and visualisations.

Tara

Dear Tara,

We're always hearing about celebs who get back to having a flat belly 2 weeks after giving birth. For those of us without Madonna's cash or inclination to exercise 4 hours a day, how good is yoga for getting back into shape?

Lucy Taylor, Southport

Tara says:

Hi Lucy,

Yoga is not only a great way to get back into shape after having a baby, but helps keep you in shape during your pregnancy so you don't have to work so hard to recover your body afterwards. It is best to wait to 6 weeks after the birth to start your exercise regime and if you have had a caesarean you may want to ease off a bit and do more gentle variations (especially with any abdominal exercises). The women who come to my mother and baby classes usually feel and look fitter after a few months of yoga classes (although 2 weeks may be pushing it a bit!). You have to be patient though and remember "nine months on, nine months off!"

Tara

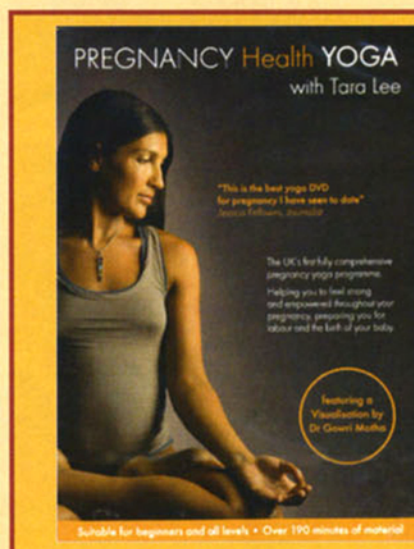
Fourth exercise of the sequence:

Mountain pose – tadasana

Coming up to standing from all fours bring the hands back towards the feet (keep feet hip width or wider depending on the size of your bump). Keep the toes tucked under and shift the weight backward to the balls of the feet, then to the heels and through the whole of the feet. Bend the knees and slowly round up through the spine keeping the chin in towards the chest. It is good to keep the body symmetrical when coming up from sitting or kneeling rather than lunging (especially if you have S.P.D.). Once you are standing up tall and feel stable, close your eyes and feel the weight evenly through both feet. Make sure that you are not standing forward on the balls of the feet or backward on the heels, rather try to stand in the centre lifting the arches (which tend to collapse during pregnancy). Ground down through all four corners of the feet and imagine you have roots anchoring you down into the earth. Start to draw up energy through the feet, up the legs, drawing up through the knee caps and thigh muscles. Check that you are not over arching the lower back (sway back) by placing one hand on the lower back and the other on your baby and play around with the tilt of the pelvis until you feel your tail bone angling down towards the floor. Then release your arms by your sides and feel yourself growing taller, lengthening up through the front and back body, feeling the spine lengthening. Imagine you have a string pulling the crown of the head up towards the sky and at the same time stay connected through the feet rooting you downwards. Feel the extra space you have created in your body and breathe into that space. Notice whether you feel lighter, taller and whether it is easier to breathe more deeply now. Correct posture during pregnancy is vital for avoiding aches and pains so practising tadasana regularly will help with the continual shift in gravity and realignment of your body. If practised regularly the body will start to automatically adopt a better posture over time. Bring the hands into prayer position, palms together in front of the chest. Take a few breaths here and then as you inhale circle the arms out to the sides, raising the arms up until the palms touch, as you exhale bring the arms back down with the palms meeting in front of the chest (heart centre). Repeat five times feeling the breath guide the movement.

TIP FOR THE MONTH

Practice hypnobirthing (either from a CD, book or course) during your pregnancy to prepare you mentally for your labour. You may also like to make a CD of your favourite relaxing music to play during your labour.



Tara Lee teaches at the Life Centre, Triyoga and new yoga centre Alchemy in Camden, London. She specialises in pregnancy and post-natal yoga and has a DVD *Pregnancy Health Yoga with Tara Lee* (available from www.yogamatters.com). She is running a pregnancy yoga retreat including hypnobirthing and birth preparation for couples at the end of June in Dorset (www.taraleeyoga.com). She has two children aged 1 and 3 years. Tara can be contacted at taraleeyoga@gmail.com.

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