



Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training

Seated and Side Lying Postures

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Seated, Kneeling and Side Lying Postures

Wide Leg Child's Pose



Warms Up:

- Shoulders
- Hips
- Back
- Knees

Steps:

- From all fours, sit back on heels, then spread knees apart, keeping heels together.
- Drop belly towards the space between the thighs and head towards mat
- Place forehead on floor
- Keep arms extended, stretching hands forward
- Breathe into back, feeling back stretch and expand on inhale and relax on exhale

Teaching Points:

Some students, especially those further along in their pregnancy, may find it becomes more difficult to breathe with their belly and chest dropped down. Have these students keep their knees apart, while keeping their hips raised (only lowering their chest), making more room for their belly.

Down Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)



Pregnant students can usually do down dog without trouble. However, they may want to raise their head slightly (look towards their hands) to avoid any dizziness.

Benefits:

- Stretches palms, chest, back, hamstrings, calves and feet
- Relieves low back discomfort
- Improves digestion
- Strengthens arms, wrists legs and torso
- Energizes the body
- Improves focus and stimulates the mind

Steps:

- Come to all fours, placing hands directly under shoulders, knees and feet hip width apart
- Spread your fingers wide
- Inhale, curl your toes under and draw your shoulder blades back
- Exhale, lift your hips and press back through your heels, drop your head
- Press your tailbone high and open your chest, pressing your chest towards your feet
- Keep your arms straight, press down through your whole hand (including thumb and index finger)
- Look towards your feet, shake your head from side to side then nod forward and back to loosen your neck and shoulders
- Pedal your heels down to the floor one at a time to get more stretch in your calves
- Breathe deeply into your back
- Stay here for 5-10 breaths
- Drop back to all fours

Modifications:



Many students later in pregnancy may have trouble with down dog. Have them do extended child's pose instead, or have them place their hands on a chair (instead of the floor) to create a "half" down dog. To create a "half" down dog, you can also have students stand facing a wall. Have them place their hands about as high as their belly on the wall, then step back and drop their chest down until their back is parallel to the floor and their hips make a right angle.

Teaching Points:

Down dog is considered one of the most fundamental of all yoga postures. It is often used between other postures as a transitional posture to keep the flow of the practice going. It is important to check that your students are doing the following:

Hands remain shoulder width apart, not too close or too far away

The distance between the hands and feet is about the same as the distance from the student's heels to their tailbone (the triangle formed is not too narrow or too wide)

Lunge



Benefits:

- Increases hip flexibility
- Stretches the front of the thighs (quadriceps)

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees - shoulders over wrists and hips over knees) or start in down dog
- Bring right foot forward, placing both hands to the left
- Check that right knee is directly over right ankle
- Scoot left foot back until gentle stretch is felt
- Stay in this position for about 6-10 breaths
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Have students move slowly and only drop hips until they feel a gentle stretch. During pregnancy women are at risk of overstretching, so it's important that students move slowly, only going to the point where they feel a very gentle stretch. Remind students to keep both hands on one side of their front foot to make more room for their belly.

Make sure that while in the lunge position, students keep their knee over their ankle or slightly behind (not in front). Bringing the knee in front of (or past the point of) the ankle can strain the ligaments in the ankle.

Prayer Squat (Malasana)



This is a great posture for pregnant women, helping to ease back strain.

Benefits:

- Opens the hips (stretches the gracilis, vastus lateralis, vastus intermedialis, vastus medialis)
- Relieves sciatica
- Improves balance
- Strengthens the arches of the feet and the ankles, stretches the ankle joint
- Alleviates low back pain
- Helps relieve constipation

Steps:

- Start standing with feet a little wider than hip width apart and turned out
- With hands on your hips or out in front of you, squat down keeping your hips off the floor
- Bring hands to heart and use elbows to press knees farther apart
- Keep heels pressing into or towards the floor
- Drop head and press thumbs against forehead to encourage relaxation
- Stay in this position for 5-6 long, slow breaths
- Sit down when done and shake legs out

Modification:

For students who have difficulty squatting fully, they can squat only half way down with a wall behind their back for support. Students can also practice Cobbler's Pose instead (see later in this section) to open the hips without having to bend the knees as far.

Teaching Points:

Many students will keep their heels raised due to less flexibility in ankle joint. Encourage students to gently press down through their heels to help stretch and improve flexibility in this area.

Pigeon (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips, thighs, chest and shoulders
- Stimulates digestion

Steps:

- Start in down dog or on all fours
- Bend right knee, sweep right knee forward, placing right knee close to right wrist
- Move right foot forward towards left wrist
- Press left foot back, dropping hips as close to floor as possible
- Draw finger tips back and squeeze shoulder blades together
- Look up and breathe deeply, staying in this position for 3-4 slow breaths
- From here, you can go back to starting position
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Students will often lean onto the same hip as their bent knee due to limited hip flexibility. Encourage students to keep their hips a few inches off the floor and square their hips forward, only dropping down as much as is comfortable for them. This will help to focus the stretch on the hip rotator muscles.

Modification:



- For your students who are further along in their pregnancy, it may be more difficult to do pigeon. Those students can do the following instead:
- Sit on a chair – sit towards the edge, so feet are flat on the floor
- Cross right ankle just above the left knee
- Place your right hand on your right knee and left hand on your right ankle
- Slowly lean forward – reaching forward with chest and bringing belly towards the space between your legs.

This modification still stretches the rotator muscles as pigeon does.

Cow's Face (Gomukhasana)



Benefits:

- Improves shoulder flexibility
- Relieves tension in shoulders and upper back
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start in kneeling position, sitting back on heels
- Reach right arm overhead, then bend right elbow, dropping hand down the back
- Exhale, bring left arm behind back, then reach left hand up the back towards the right hand
- Clasp hands together. If hands don't reach each other, use a strap to hold between the two hands
- Breathe deeply through the nose. Stay in this position 4-5 breaths
- Release hands
- Repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to slightly tuck the tailbone under to reduce any sway back that may occur. This will help reduce any strain on the low back. Also, instruct students to bring the top elbow as close to the back of the head as possible. This will help increase the stretch in the shoulders.

Half Camel



This is an appropriate alternative to traditional camel for your pregnant students.

Benefits:

- Stretches the thighs, torso, chest, shoulders and throat
- Strengthens the legs, pelvis and lower back
- Aids digestion
- Stimulates circulation
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start in a kneeling position with knees about hip width apart
- Place fists or palms on low back and draw back the elbows and shoulders, squeezing the shoulder blades
- Point feet straight back with tops of the feet on the floor
- Inhale, stretch up through the top of your head
- Exhale, press hips forward as you arch back and head falls back
- Allow the chest and throat to fully open
- Take 4-5 deep breaths through the nose in this position.
- Slowly come back up
- Sit back on heels and rest in child's pose (chest dropped to thighs) for 3-4 breaths
- Come back to kneeling and repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

If a student has neck problems, instruct them to keep looking forward, instead of dropping their head back, while they keep pressing their hips forward and squeezing their shoulder blades together.

Frog



This is a great alternative for pregnant women who find it difficult to breathe in wide leg child's pose.

Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders and chest
- Relieves headache
- Quiets the mind

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Walk hands forward, bringing chest and forehead towards the floor, while keeping the hips raised (thighs stay vertical to the floor)
- Stay in this position for a minute or two, breathing into your back
- Slowly come back up to all fours

Teaching Points

Remind students to drop their chest towards the floor. This will help open the chest and stretch the shoulders. Have students bring their focus to their breath and to relax their shoulders more with each exhalation.

Thread the Needle



Benefits:

- Stretches shoulders and upper back
- Gently stretches the spine
- Provides a gentle inversion that is suitable for pregnant women

Steps:

- Start on all fours
- Inhale, lift your right hand off the floor
- Exhale, sweep your right hand between your left hand and your knees
- Place your right arm on the floor with your palm up
- Rest your right cheek on the floor
- Gently press down with the left hand to go more deeply into the posture
- Stay in this position for about 1 minute, breathing deeply into your upper back
- Come back to all fours
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Encourage your students to relax fully and allow the floor to fully support the weight of their upper body.

Gate (Parighasasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches muscles along the sides of the body
- Opens the chest
- Tone abdominal organs
- Strengthens the ankle and hip joint
- Stretches the inner thigh and calves

Steps:

- Kneel on the floor with knees about hips width apart and hands on hips
- Stretch right leg out to the side, keeping foot in line with left knee and turning right foot forward (facing same direction as head and torso)
- Inhale, reach arms overhead
- Exhale, drop your right hand down your right leg
- Keep reaching your left hand straight up towards ceiling, or reach left hand towards the right hand
- Keep chest open (not dropped towards the floor)
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths through the nose
- Inhale, reach arms overhead
- Exhale, bring arms back to sides and come back to kneeling position
- Repeat on other side

Teaching Points:

Students often drop their chest, turning their torso towards the extended leg. Remind them to keep their chest open and forward and for them to imagine bringing their side towards the extended leg. Also, instruct students to draw back the shoulder of the raised arm. This helps keep the chest open and stretch the shoulder.

Modified Plank



Regular plank pose is not appropriate for pregnant women. Encourage students to try the modification.

Benefits:

- Strengthens arms and wrists
- Improves core strength
- Stretches wrists and toes

Steps:

- Start on all fours (on hands and knees) with hands under shoulders and hips over knees
- Walk hands forward about 3-5 inches
- Reach forward with head and chest until shoulders are once again directly over the wrists
- Lift up through the abdominal muscles, so the hips don't drop and back stays straight – not swayed
- There should be one straight line from the neck to the tailbone
- From here, you can press back to Child's Pose – sit back on your heels and spread your knees apart as you lower your belly and forehead towards the floor

Modified Side Plank (with and without a ball)



Nice alternatives to traditional side plank for your prenatal students.

Benefits:

- Improves balance
- Builds core strength
- Strengthens legs, arms, shoulders and wrists
- Stretches the wrists
- Lengthens the spine
- Improves leg and hip flexibility

Steps (with ball):

- Start sitting with your feet to your right
- Turn towards the right as you place an exercise ball under the left arm (under the left side of your body).
- Roll your side onto the ball as you bring your left hand to the floor
- Straighten your legs, stacking one foot on top of the other
- Inhale, reach your right arm overhead. Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths.
- Slowly roll back down to sitting.
- Repeat on the other side.



Steps (without ball):

- Start on all fours (hands under shoulders and knees under hips)
- Kick the right foot out to the side – like a kick stand
- Move the right hand slightly to the left – so it is directly under the neck
- Extend the left foot back on the floor with the toes curled under
- Inhale, turn to the side, sweeping the left arm up overhead
- Press up through hips (hips should be slightly raised so side of body forms a gentle curve)
- Right arm should be at a right angle to torso with wrist directly under shoulder. There should be a straight line from the right hand to the left hand
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths, breathing through the nose
- Turn back towards mat, dropping left hand back to mat
- Come back to all fours
- Repeat modified side plank on the other side
- After completing the posture on both sides, end with wide leg Child's Pose

Boat (Navasana) / Modified Boat



Boat



Modified Boat

Benefits:

- Builds core strength
- Improves balance, digestion and circulation
- Strengthens the legs, hips, abdomen and arms
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start sitting with knees apart (to make room for belly) and bent towards the ceiling and feet on the floor
- Place hands under thighs and draw shoulders back to open through chest
- Keep focus forward (not up or down)
- Lean back towards tailbone, while keeping chest open and shoulders back
- When ready, lift feet off the floor (can be anywhere from a few inches off floor to legs almost straight, depending on stage of pregnancy)
- Stay in this position for 3-4 soft breaths
- Slowly drop feet back to floor
- Counter with Cobbler's Pose, then with Sun Worshipper

Teaching Points:

Check that students keep their shoulders back and chest open. Many students have a tendency to round their backs as they lift their feet off the floor. Prenatal students should keep their knees apart to make room for their belly and keep their knees bent (instead of straight as in traditional Boat). Keeping the knees bent causes less strain in the back and belly. Remember to have students do Cobbler's pose after Boat. This brings the pelvis in the opposite position and stretches many of the muscles that were previously contracted in Boat Pose.

Cobbler's Pose



Benefits:

- Opens hips
- Stretches muscles of the back and hips
- Relieves stress and tension

Steps:

- From sitting, bring soles of feet together
- Press feet forward until legs make a diamond shape
- Hold onto shins or ankles and pull shoulders back
- Exhale, fold forward, bringing chest towards feet
- Relax head and neck, and drop elbows out to the sides
- Stay in this position for 4-5 long, slow breaths
- Slowly raise head and chest and come back to sitting

Exploration:

Try Cobbler's Pose first with feet only out to the point where they are in line with the knees. As you fold forward, you'll notice more of a stretch in the inner thigh. Raise head and chest back to sitting. Then press your feet out a little further away from your body. As you fold forward, notice how the stretch changes. You will most likely now feel the stretch more in the back of the hips and back of the upper thigh. As you press your feet farther away, notice how the stretch is felt increasingly further down the back of the thigh.

Teaching Points:

Many students familiar with butterfly position automatically bring their feet in close. Remind students to press their feet forward to bring the stretch into their thighs and to make room for their belly. Also remind students to fold forward from the hips by pressing back through their sitting bones and tipping the pelvis forward rather than only rounding the back.

Seated Straddle



Benefits:

- Opens hips
- Stretches muscles of the hips and legs
- Relieves stress and tension

Steps:

- From sitting, spread legs apart into a straddle
- Wiggle your bottom back a little ways, so you are sitting towards the front of your sitting bones
- Turn toes up towards the ceiling. This will help you stay forward on your sitting bones and create an even stretch in the backs of the legs
- Interlace fingers behind your back and roll shoulders back.
- You can stay here, or bring hands to the floor in front of you and walk them slightly forward.
- Keep reaching forward with your chest, maintaining a flat back (not rounded) and take 4-5 slow deep breaths.
- Slowly bring legs back together

Teaching Points:

Many students may begin to round their back and sit back on their tailbones in this position. Encourage students to sit towards the front of their sitting bones, tilting the pelvic bowl forward. This will help stretch the legs, and strengthen the muscles in the back.

Sun Worshipper



Benefits:

- Relieves tension in upper back
- Stretches shoulders and chest
- Opens throat and enhances breathing

Steps:

- Start sitting with legs crossed or sitting back on heels (from kneeling)
- Bring hands back, placing hands on the floor with fingertips pointing back
- Inhale, lift up through chest and squeeze shoulder blades together to open chest more
- Exhale, let head fall back
- Breathe deeply through nose
- Stay in this position for 4-5 deep breaths
- On inhale, relax shoulders, rolling them forward and lift head, coming back to starting position

Teaching Points:

Check that students' wrists are directly under their shoulders and that students keep squeezing shoulder blades and open through the chest. For any students with neck problems, have them look forward, rather than let the head fall back, but encourage them to still squeeze their shoulder blades together and lift up through the chest. This will allow them to still stretch the shoulders and chest and relieve upper back tension without compromising their neck.

Modified Eagle (Garundasana) – seated version



This modified version of eagle is a useful alternative during pregnancy.

Benefits:

- Improves coordination
- Enhances concentration
- Stretches shoulders and the muscles around shoulder blades

Steps (for seated):

- Start sitting in easy seated posture
- Inhale, reach your arms overhead
- Exhale, drop your arms to shoulder height and cross your right arm under your left arm.
- Bend your elbows, bringing your hands towards your face and wrap your forearms around each other, bringing your palms together.
- Stay here, or, on your next exhale, draw your elbows and shoulders down, so the tops of your fingers are just below eye level.
- Tuck your tailbone to keep your low back from swaying too much.
- Focus on one point in front of you and focus on your breath.
- Stay in this position for 3-4 slow breaths. Or with your arms still crossed, stretch your fingertips up until you feel a stretch in your back
- Release your arms, raising arms overhead
- Repeat, with the other arm underneath as you cross your arms.

Steps (for standing/squatting)

- Start standing with feet about hip width apart and parallel
- Do all the steps for the arms the same, but in a standing or squatting position. Keep the legs and feet parallel (not crossed) to provide more stability than in typical eagle posture.

Teaching Points:

Instruct students to tuck their tailbone once they are in this position. This helps keep the pelvis in a neutral position, especially during pregnancy. Also, encourage students keep their knees bent if they are squatting to keep working the muscles in the legs.

Modified Locust



Traditional locust is not appropriate for most pregnant women. This variation provides the same back strengthening benefits without having to lie on the belly.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the back muscles
- Relieves tension in the shoulders and upper back

Steps:

- Start sitting on a chair – sitting towards the edge, so feet are flat on the floor and back is straight
- Spread feet and knees apart
- Reach forward with chest as you lower down
- Bring hands behind you, squeezing shoulder blades together.
- Stay in this position for 4 to 6 breaths
- Come back up to sitting
- Repeat one or two more times

Easy Seated Twist



During pregnancy, twisting should only be done in the thoracic (upper) region of the back.

Benefits:

- Relieves tension in the upper back and shoulders
- Improves postures
- Develops more strength in the upper back

Steps:

- Start in a cross leg position (easy seated position)
- On an inhale, sit up tall
- Exhale, turn to the side, placing the opposite hand on the opposite knee
- Turn the head to look behind you
- On each inhale, sit up taller, and on each exhale, turn the shoulders a little more.

Remind students to twist through the shoulders (not the belly) and to let their belly remain relaxed and facing forward.

Seated Staff Pose (Dandasana)



Benefits:

- Tones abdominal muscles
- Opens the chest
- Stretches and strengthens the legs
- Strengthens the torso, arms and spine

Steps:

- Sit with your legs extended
- Sit up tall and scoot your sitting bones back, so you are sitting on the top of your sitting bones. During pregnancy, many people will need to lean back slightly to make room for their belly.
- Bring your feet together and turn your legs, so your knees are facing directly up (not turned out to the sides)
- Press your hands into the floor as you reach up through the top of your head to lengthen your spine
- Flex your feet as much as possible, until you feel a stretch in your calves
- Breathe fully through your nose, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths
- Point your toes, stretching through the fronts of your legs.
- Breathe in this position for 4-5 breaths, then relax your legs.

Modification:

Some students may find it places strain on their low back when sitting on the floor like this, due to tight hamstrings. Have those students place the edge of a blanket or rolled towel under their sitting bones. Raising the hips requires less hamstring flexibility than sitting all the way down on the floor. Eventually students can reduce the height of the blanket or towel and then eliminate it completely.

Teaching Points:

Remind students to keep their knees facing directly up towards the ceiling. The powerful external rotator muscles of the hip tend to cause the feet to turn out automatically when we're not paying attention. Keeping the knee facing up will help strengthen the muscles that internally rotate the hip.

Seated One-Leg Forward Fold (Janu Sirsasana)



Benefits:

- Stretches the calve, hamstrings and lower back muscles
- Improves digestion
- Strengthens low back
- Alleviates headache and stress

Steps:

- Start seated with legs extended
- Bend the left knee, placing the sole of the left foot next to the right thigh
- Scoot back, so you are on the front part of sitting bones
- Sit up tall
- Raise arms forward and up to shoulder height
- Exhale, reach forward, as belly drops toward the inside of the extended leg (leave enough room for expanded belly)
- Keep reaching forward with head and chin, while pressing back through the hips
- Relax arms, shoulders and neck
- Breathe deeply through the nose, focusing on the exhalation, staying in this position for 4-5 breaths.
- Inhale, slowly come up to sitting
- Extend left leg next to right leg and shake out legs
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Sitting forward bends with one foot tucked in are among the most useful hip flexibility stretches for prenatal students. They do not place as much stress on the lower back and sacroiliac joints as keeping both legs straight, and are helpful for working on right-left imbalances. Remind students to keep their chin away from their chest and to press back through the hips. Keeping the chin away from the chest helps prevent the upper back from rounding too much. Pressing back through the hips helps tilt the pelvis, so students are bending from the hips rather than rounding from the back, which can strain the low back.

Half Lotus (Padmasana)



Benefits:

- Opens the hips
- Increases knee flexibility
- Improves posture

Steps:

- Start sitting in Staff Pose (Dandasana)
- Bring your right heel towards your navel
- Externally rotate your leg and foot and place the top of your right foot on your left thigh at the hip crease (the sole of your right foot faces up towards the ceiling)
- Bend your left knee, bringing your left foot next to your right shin
- Place your hands on your thighs or at your sides
- Inhale deeply and extend from your low belly up through the top of your head
- Lengthen up through the sides of your body and draw your shoulders back
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath, breathing slowly through your nose
- Stay in this position for 4-6 breaths
- Use your hands to gently remove your left foot from your right thigh and then remove your right foot from the left thigh
- Shake out your legs
- Repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

With prenatal students, it's best to only do half lotus (keeping the second foot on the floor) rather than full lotus (bringing the second foot to the opposite thigh), so you don't risk having them overstretch. Have students notice any differences in their flexibility between the two sides and work towards bringing the two sides into balance.

Reclined Side Leg Lift (Anatasana)



Side lying postures are best for pregnant women, since they usually should not lie on their bellies or on their backs.

Benefits:

- Stretches the hips and inner thighs
- Opens the hamstring muscles
- Relieves low back discomfort
- Improves digestion

Steps:

- Start lying on your right side
- Place right hand under head for support
- Slightly bend right knee
- Inhale, bring left knee towards chest and place left hand around sole of left foot or ankle
- Exhale, extend left leg and bring leg towards torso
- Be careful to stay on side of body and not roll onto back
- Stay in this position for 4-6 long breaths, breathing through the nose
- Exhale, bend left knee and slowly place left leg on top of right leg
- Roll onto other side and repeat on the other side

Teaching Points:

Students often have a tendency to roll onto their backs in this position or to turn their knee cap so it fully faces the floor. Remind students to keep working to turn their knee slightly forward. This will help bring the stretch to the inner thigh.

Savasana for Prenatal Students



For your prenatal students, you want to encourage them to practice savasana lying on their side. You can have your students bring two pillows and a blanket to class. One pillow is for under the head, the other pillow is to be placed between the knees. Placing a pillow between the knees helps to keep the spine in a straight line, reducing any strain on the back.

The practice of relaxation in Savasana is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself and your students. The focus in savasana is to completely relax the body. Learning to relax and breathe well will help you stay centered in the midst of days filled with multiple commitments – and will help you recover from nights when you had less sleep than you need.

Always leave time for savasana at the end of your practice and at the end of any class you teach. You can also practice savasana by itself to relieve fatigue and bring back your natural state of balance.

Benefits of Savasana:

- Removes fatigue
- Allows the mind to rest
- Decrease muscular tension
- Relieves mental stress and anxiety
- Improves sleep

Steps:

- Lie on your side on the floor (on your mat or thin blanket)
- Let your top foot drop in front of the bottom foot
- Bring your arms in front of your chest
- Take a deep breath in through the nose and exhale through the mouth, saying “ahhh”
- Do this breath a couple more time, giving all your attention to releasing any tension with each exhalation

- Allow your breathing to become natural again
- Focus on each part of your body, feeling each part relax, starting with the feet and legs and working all the way up through the head
- Bring awareness back to the breath and with each gentle breath, bring your awareness more deeply inside your body, letting go of the outside world
- Rest here for 5 to 10 minutes
- When you are done resting, slowly begin moving your hands and feet first, then stretch your arms overhead. Come back up to sitting.

Below are some suggestions to give your students as they settle into savasana to help them focus on each part of the body and relax more completely:

- Let your feet relax and flop out to the sides
- Feel the muscles in your calves relax
- Feel the muscles in your thighs fall away from the bones
- Release your hips and feel them open
- Feel your belly become soft and round
- Let your shoulders relax
- Feel your arms and hands become heavy
- Let your mouth open slightly and your jaw become loose
- Feel your forehead become soft and the muscles in your face relax
- Let your breath be natural – with each breath allow yourself to go more deeply inside, finding that quiet place within you where no one else exists