



## **Parent and Baby Yoga**

**By Nancy Wile  
Yoga Education Institute**

## **Parent and Baby Yoga**

Once prenatal students give birth, they can continue their yoga practice with you through parent-baby yoga classes. Guiding a baby through early movement can boost her/his ability to crawl, walk and sit, according to Yoga Journal. Parents and babies can perform yoga poses together that allow them to bond. The movement also delights baby.

The benefits of yoga for babies and toddlers:

- Better sleep
- Improved digestion and less gas
- Decreased fussiness
- Develops early habit of healthy physical exercise
- Strengthens the parent child bond
- Improved neuromuscular development
- Helps to boost the immune system
- Reduces stress and teaches self-relaxation techniques
- Increases body awareness
- Improves coordination

Babies often sleep better and are less fussy after practicing yoga with their parents because yoga can help them feel more comfortable. Just like it does for adults, yoga engages muscles and then releases them, helping the baby feel more relaxed. Better digestion can also help babies feel more comfortable, and yoga does this by gently strengthening and massaging the intestines through body movement and positioning.

The outside world, and the many electronic toys that are available today, can be overly stimulating to many babies and toddlers. Yoga can reduce this stress through the calm slow movements and through the calming touch that is a big part of parent-baby yoga. Furthermore, yoga provides great stress relief for parents, and when parents are more relaxed their babies tend to feel more relaxed.

## **Parent-Baby Yoga Basics**

One of the main differences between yoga for adults and yoga for babies (or kids) is the amount of talking. In an adult yoga class, it is typically the instructor who does almost all the talking. However, in a parent and baby yoga class, it is important to encourage parents to talk with their babies as they go through the practice. Most babies love the tone of their parent's familiar voice, whether they are singing or talking. It also helps brain development and language development, and sets the tempo for movements.

During most of a parent-baby yoga practice, you will be seated, on all fours, or lying down. It's best to practice on a yoga mat with a blanket placed under baby for added comfort. You can think of a blanket as the baby's yoga mat.

Remind parents that yoga is not something you do to your baby, but is something you do together. So, it is important to honor your baby's wishes. The baby should enjoy the practice. If baby becomes hungry or tired, it is important to stop the practice and listen to the baby's needs. Some more subtle ways that babies let us know that they are not enjoying something (beyond crying) are by becoming stiff or arching their backs off the floor.

The best time to practice yoga with a baby is when he or she is fed, alert, and has a fresh diaper.

A good basic guideline to follow is: the smaller/younger the baby, the slower the transition time and the slower the movement.

If a baby gets fussy during yoga practice, try the following:

- Gently hold the baby and breathe slowly and deeply
- Slow down the movement of the exercise
- Check if your baby has an immediate need (hungry, need diaper change, sleep, etc)
- Try it again in a couple days

Yoga practice with babies is short. The actual practice that babies do may be anywhere from a couple minutes to 25 minutes. If you are teaching a parent and baby yoga class, 45 minutes is usually a good length of time. It gives time for parents to check in with each other, for babies to have a short yoga practice, for babies to interact with each other, and for parents to practice some additional postures, and for quiet time and discussion.

In any practice remember to be gentle, be present, be patient.

Remind your students that they are the perfect parent for their child.

## **Yoga for Newborns to 4 months**

Before beginning a parent-baby yoga session, have each parent spend time holding their baby (chest to chest) and practicing slow deep diaphragmatic breathing.

### **Baby-Parent Belly Breathing**



- Sit in a comfortable seated position with an erect spine
- Hold your baby chest to chest with one arm under baby's bottom and the other hand supporting baby's head and neck
- Begin breathing slowly and deeply
- As you inhale, feel your belly rise and ribs expand, breathing from the bottom of your lungs and then feeling the air rise up
- As you exhale, feel your shoulders relax and then squeeze your belly to press all the air out.
- Each inhale should take about 5 second and each exhale should take about 5 seconds
- As you do this breathing, notice the baby's breathing, and notice if their breathing begins to become more calm as your breathing slows down.

## Baby Om



- Sit in a comfortable seated position
- Hold your baby so he/she is facing you
- Place your baby next to your chest (so you are chest to chest)
- Lift your chin and place the crown of baby's head under your chin and baby's forehead against your throat (baby may need to turn slightly to the side)
- Inhale, then as you exhale, open your mouth and gently (not too loud) chant OM.
- Repeat 3 times
- This creates a calming vibration for you and baby

## Baby resting on thighs – focused breathing



- Sit against a wall with their knees bent and feet on the floor. Knees should be at a 45 degree angle directly in front of you.
- Place their baby on your thighs, so the baby is resting against your thighs and looking up towards you.
- Gaze at baby and focus on the rhythm of his breath. Smile softly and look into your baby's eyes as you breathe slowly and deeply.

## Diagonal Stretch



- Place your baby on his/her back and kneel or sit by their feet
- Hold your baby's right hand with your left thumb and first two fingers
- Hold your baby's left foot with your right hand
- With much care, gently stretch baby's hand and foot in the opposite direction – giving just a small tug
- Repeat this gentle tug 3 or 4 more times
- Repeat on the other side

## Open/Close



- Place your baby on his/her back and kneel or sit by their feet
- Hold your baby's hands
- Begin to open and close baby's arms
- You can sing to the movement:  
"Open, shut them, open, shut them,  
Give a little clap, clap, clap.  
Open, shut them, open, shut them,  
Lay them in your lap, lap, lap."

### **Baby squats**

- Sit on the floor with your legs extended out in front of you
- Spread your legs apart enough to make room for baby
- Place baby on his/her back between your legs
- Wrap your hands around the soles of baby's feet
- Gently press baby's feet forward (so the knees bend) and then gently bring his/her feet back towards you
- Inhale as you gently draw baby's feet towards you, and exhale as you gently press baby's feet back towards them.

### **Windshield Wiper feet**

- Sit with your legs in an easy straddle, with baby lying on back on the floor
- Wrap your hands around the soles of baby's feet
- Gently swish baby's feet from side to side like windshield wipers

### **Sacrum Rub**

- Sit with your back against a wall
- Prop your right knee into a 45 degree angle while keeping your foot on the floor
- Place your baby on his/her tummy on the front surface of your right thigh
- Slide your left hand between your thigh and your baby and support baby's head in a burp hold (hand under baby's chin and thumb near one cheek and fingers near the other cheek)
- Locate baby's sacrum – a little bit above the tailbone
- Use your first two fingers of your right hand to press gently on the sacrum
- Make circles with your two fingers over the sacrum, going in one direction and then the other

### **Head Holders**

The best age to begin guiding your baby through yoga poses is when she is able to hold her head up -- typically at age 3 to 4 months. Performing yoga poses with your baby several times a week helps her sleep more soundly, eases gas pains and increases body awareness.

### **Fish**

The Fish pose helps to boost your baby's circulation. Place your baby on his back and kneel beside your baby. Place one hand under his back to create a slight arch, where your baby's shoulders and bottom touch the ground. Using your other hand, gently hold your baby's feet down. For added engagement, sing to your baby while holding the pose.

### **Shoulderstand**

Baby Shoulder stand is beneficial in aiding digestion and elimination. To practice, place your baby on his back supported by a carpet or blanket. Kneeling at your baby's feet, gently grasp his thighs and lift your baby's legs in the air. His shoulders, neck and head should remain on the floor. Hold from eight to 25 seconds. Watch for signals from your baby that he is ready to change poses, such as arching his back or turning his head. Lower your baby's legs and repeat one to three times. Shoulder stand can also be done with baby lying on your legs.



### **Downward Dog**

Babies can perform this basic yoga exercise with a little help from their parents, according to "Yoga Journal." Downward Dog is best performed by babies at least 5 months of age and can serve as a precursor to walking. To begin, place your baby on her stomach. Slowly lift her buttock in the air to where her weight is on her feet. Depending on her age, your baby may not be able to put her hands on the ground for support. However, as she ages she may be able to create the Downward Dog triangle shape with the feet and hands touching the ground.



## Hands and Feet Twist



- Lay baby on his/her back
- Gently hold their right hand and foot in one hand, and their left hand and foot in your other hand
- Bring hands and feet all together and then apart
- Gently roll baby from side to side

## Sing with Movement



You can sing a variety of songs coordinated with the movement of your baby. Here's an example:

Hold baby's feet and gently begin to bicycle his/her legs while singing:

“The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round

The wheels on the bus go round and round, all through the town.”

Then hold baby's feet and windshield wiper the feet while singing:

“The wipers on the bus go swish, swish, swish...swish, swish, swish...swish, swish, swish

The wipers of the bus go swish, swish, swish, all through the town.”

## Parent Yoga – with baby as observer

It's important to give parents time for their own yoga practice. During this time, the baby can be observer or can be part of the parent's posture. The following postures are some that parents can do when their baby is with them.

### Sharing Time



- Sit in a circle with babies on lap facing each other
- Give everyone a chance to mention anything that is going on for themselves or with their baby that day.
- Allow this time to be a supportive and positive experience for parents, and a time for babies to watch and interact

### Baby Cat/Cow



- Place baby on a mat or blanket on the floor on their back or on their belly (depending on age)
- Come onto all fours directly over baby
- Inhale, look up and drop your belly as you pull your shoulders back
- Exhale, round your back and drop your head as you say hello to your baby
- Repeat this movement for about 10 breaths

## Modified Push Up with Baby



- With baby lying on his/her back, come onto all fours
- Bring your hands slightly forward so they are on either side of baby's head
- Lean forward so your shoulders are directly over your wrists
- Inhale, then as you exhale, slowly lower your chest down towards baby, keeping your elbows in as you lower down
- Kiss baby on the forehead
- Inhale, come back up to all fours
- Repeat 4-6 times

## Modified Plank and Hip Hinges with Baby



- Place your baby on his/her back
- Come onto all fours with your hands on either side of your baby
- Walk your knees back a little, so you can come into a modified plank
- Lean forward into your plank, engaging your abdominal muscles so you don't drop your belly, doing your best to create one straight line from your neck to your bottom
- Stay here for a couple breaths
- As you exhale, push back into child's pose
- Inhale, come back into modified plank (you can say peek a boo to baby as you come forward)
- Continue moving back and forth, moving with your breath 6-8 times
- Then rest in child's pose for a few breaths

## Dolphin Variation



You can do a variation of plank/hip hinges by coming onto your forearms in dolphin position and moving back and forth in a swimming dolphin

## Down Dog with baby



- Place baby in the middle of your mat (on back or in crawling position, depending on age)
- Go into down dog position over your baby
- Inhale, lift your head, looking forward
- Exhale, drop your head down, looking at baby and say peek-a-boo

## Dolphin Kisses



- Place baby on his/her back on your mat
- Come onto all fours with your hands on either side of your baby
- Come onto your forearms (with forearms on either side of baby)
- Push into dolphin (down dog on forearms)
- As you inhale, come forward and drop your hips a little, so you can kiss baby
- On your exhale, push back into dolphin (down dog on forearms)

## Baby Barbell



- Lie on your back and hold your baby chest to chest
- Place your hands around your baby's rib cage
- Inhale, press your elbows straight as you lift your baby straight up
- Exhale, bend your elbows and bring baby back onto your chest
- Repeat 8-12 times
- Rest with baby lying chest to chest

## Core Work with Baby



- Sit up with your knees bent slightly and feet on the floor
- Place your baby on your lap facing you with her back against your thighs
- As you roll down onto your back, bend your knees more, so baby is sitting up more
- Keep your hands on baby or place your hands behind your head if baby's balance is good.
- As you exhale, sit up slightly, lifting up through your chest and keeping your head and neck relaxed
- Inhale, lower back to the floor
- Repeat this movement 8-10 times



## Hop Along Yogi Core Play



- Lie on your back with your baby on your chest (lying chest to chest)
- Bend your knees and bring your knees towards your chest
- Lift baby up and gently place baby on your shins
- Flex your feet and hold onto baby's arms or chest
- Exhale, lift your head and bring your knees closer to your chest
- Inhale, lower your head towards the floor and shift your knees away from you.
- Repeat this movement 4-6 times
- Bring your knees to your chest and gently lift baby off your shins and bring baby back to your chest (lying chest to chest)

## Divine Drops



- Start standing holding baby facing out
- Place one arm under baby's armpit around the front of their chest and the other arm between baby's thighs for support
- Step your feet out about 2-3 feet apart
- Turn your feet out
- Inhale, stand up tall
- Exhale, squat down
- Repeat this movement about 8-10 times



## Warrior 1 Flow with Baby



- Hold baby with their back next to your chest – both hands around their torso
- Step your right foot forward about 2 to 2 ½ feet
- Inhale, bend your front knee as you lift your baby up and forward
- As you exhale, straighten your front knee and bring baby back to your chest
- Repeat 4-6 times
- Switch sides and do the same thing with the left leg forward

Variation – Warrior 1 can also be done holding baby chest to chest with baby's legs on either side of your front thigh



## Open/Shut Extended Side Angle



- Place baby on a blanket on his/her back
- Stand to the side of your baby, so your left foot is near baby's head
- Step your right foot out so you are standing in a straddle
- Turn your left foot towards the wall in front of you
- Turn your right foot in slightly
- Inhale, raise your arms up
- Exhale, bend your left knee and place your left forearm on your thigh or place your left hand on the floor
- Inhale, reach your right arm overhead
- You can stay here, or as you exhale, slowly drop your right hand to give baby a gentle pat, and inhale, reach your right hand back up towards the sky
- Stay here for 4-6 breaths
- Come back up to standing
- Stand on the other side of baby and repeat the posture on the other side

## Baby Lifts in a Circle



- Sit in a circle facing the other parents
- Place your baby on your lap, facing out towards the other babies
- Place your hands around your baby's rib cage
- Inhale, lift your baby up
- Exhale, bring baby back to your lap
- Repeat this 8-10 times
- Rest with some quiet breathing

## Side Stretches with Baby

Depending on the age, the baby can be positioned the following ways for a variety of side stretches for the parent.



## Half Boat



- Sit with your knees slightly bent and feet on the floor
- Place your baby on thighs looking towards you
- Inhale, lift up through your chest and lean back towards your tailbone
- Exhale, lift your feet off the floor
- Stay in this position for 3-4 breaths
- Repeat 3 times
- Come down and place your baby on their back as you spread your knees out to either side and go into cobbler's pose for a counter pose.

## Butterfly



- Sit on the floor with baby sitting between your legs and facing out
- Bring the soles of your feet together and sit up tall
- Inhale, draw your shoulders back and lengthen through your spine
- Exhale, drop your knees towards the floor
- Stay in this position for 6-8 breaths, breathing slowly and deeply, using your breath to calm yourself and your baby

## Cobbler's Pose



- Sit on the floor with baby sitting between your legs and facing out
- Bring the soles of your feet together and sit up tall
- Inhale wrap your arms around baby while holding onto the soles of your feet
- Exhale, begin to fold forward, helping baby to fold slightly forward too.
- Stay here for about 6 breaths
- On your next inhale, come back up to sitting

## Baby Bridge



- Lie on your back and place baby sitting on your belly with their legs on either side of your waist
- Hold onto baby
- Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor
- As you inhale, lift your hips off the floor, coming into a bridge
- As you exhale, slowly lower your hips back to the floor
- Repeat 6 times
- When you are done, place baby on your chest (lying chest to chest) and slowly come back up to sitting

## Plow



- Lie on your back and place baby on your belly, lying chest to chest
- Lift your feet up towards the ceiling, coming into a modified version of plow
- Flex your feet, point your toes, and rotate your ankles
- On an inhale, gently lift baby straight up in the air
- Exhale, slowly lower baby back to your belly
- Repeat 6 times
- Bring baby back to your chest and slowly come back up to sitting

## **Savasana**

There are different position options you can offer your students during final relaxation, including:

### **Heart to Heart (or Belly to Belly)**

Adults lie on their backs, while their babies lie on their bellies on top of their parent's chest

### **Side by Side**

Parents lie on their backs and place their baby to their side (also on their backs)

### **Sitting Baby**

This position is best for a little bit older babies. Parents lie on their backs with their knees a little bent and feet on the floor. Baby sits between his or her parent's thighs.

During savasana, encourage parents to relax each of their muscles section by section. Let their shoulders relax and draw back slightly as their chest and heart open. Let each part of their body relax – from their feet and legs, up through their hips, belly, jaw, face and head. Encourage them to feel themselves connecting with their baby on all levels. Try to have at least five minutes of relaxation time.