

Birth Of a New Practice

*If You've Got a Newborn,
It's the Perfect Time To Take Up Yoga*

By Christina Elston

From the editors: After months of taking care of yourself, and working and planning and waiting, that new life is finally here and now your total energy is focused on taking care of your son or daughter. But taking care of yourself is still a must, and a postpartum yoga class is one great way to do that. Look to the pregnancy resources section on page 26 for some studio listings, or check out everythingyoga.com.

If you've just had a baby, you might not be focusing much on things you've been "meaning to get to." After all, with a newborn around you have lots to do. But if taking up a yoga practice is on your "want to" list, this could be the perfect time.

"A woman who has just had a baby is very much in her body," explains Sari Heifetz, an L.A.-based yoga instructor (www.sariyoga.net) who teaches private classes in her students' homes. "You just sort of direct that attention." And there are dozens of yoga teachers and studios in SoCal ready to help you begin.

You shouldn't begin, however, until at least six weeks after your baby is born (unless you're pregnant, in which case you can start taking prenatal yoga after your second month) and you have an OK from your doctor.



Inside Out

And when you do get started, Pasadena yoga instructor Farzaneh Noori thinks it's a good idea to begin on your back. That is how Noori, who opened Yoga House in Pasadena (www.yogahouse.com) 12 years ago, likes to kick off her Wednesday afternoon prenatal/postpartum class.

"For some of my postpartum ladies, that's the only time they get to lie down on the back all day," Noori laughs. During her six years teaching postpartum yoga, she has learned to help women work "from the inside out." Pregnancy and birth bring so many emotional changes that Noori believes the first task in postpartum yoga is to calm the new mom's nervous system and emotional state. Some poses, she explains, can even help clear that "new mom fog" that comes with a newborn.

The restorative and breathing aspects of yoga, says Heifetz, can also help re-build your energy level and “reintegrate the new self.” Yoga can also help even things out, an essential to making it through all the lifestyle changes in store for new moms. “I think it just helps to restore our sense of balance,” Heifetz says.

San Gabriel Valley mom Allison, a veteran member of Noori’s pre/postnatal class, had been taking yoga classes for just a few months when she became pregnant. Her son, Nate, was born in early fall and she finds she is more tense than she was during her pregnancy. The yoga studio is her oasis of calm. “It’s become a space for me to unwind and relax,” she says.

Getting Physical

While emotional calm and restoration are major aspects of postpartum yoga, that’s not all that’s going on. There is also some major physical rebuilding in the works.

Noori says that after calming the nervous system, her second goal is to bring the internal organs back into position. (Remember where those used to be before the baby moved in?) Her third goal is to stabilize the spine and her fourth is to strengthen the muscles – especially the pelvic floor. “Think of it,” she explains. “All of your organs are hanging there, and the only thing keeping them in are the pelvic muscles.”

So Noori includes Kegel exercises in every postpartum class to help keep everything where it’s supposed to be.

Noori’s student Allison says she finds herself spending lots of time in plank pose (like the top of a push-up) to build her

**“It’s become a space for me to
unwind and relax.”**
-Allison, new mom to Nate



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abdominal muscles, and downward facing dog (with hands and feet on the floor and hips in the air) for a good stretch. And as she cares for her new son, with all the awkward stretching and lifting and carrying that entails, she finds yoga a good reminder of proper posture, “just being mindful of how you’re holding your body.”

Heifetz has noticed that her postpartum students gather lots of neck and shoulder tension as new moms, which she says yoga helps relieve. She also points to strengthening the core and upper and lower back as additional priorities.

Of course, this won’t all happen overnight. Heifetz likes to remind new moms that it took nine months to stretch out those abdominal muscles, and they should be patient and give themselves at least nine months to get them back into shape. And Noori recommends that new moms spend at least a year in classes geared to postpartum work before taking up regular yoga classes.

Despite their physical challenges, Noori says that postpartum yoga classes can be safe for all women. And Allison recalls that yoga was on her conservative OB-GYN’s short list of acceptable activities. “That was one of the few things she was really in favor of,” she says. For moms who have had C-sections or other complications, poses can easily be modified. “The whole point of yoga,” Allison says, “is working with where you’re at.”

Connecting

Yoga can also fulfill other needs, like a new mom’s need to just plain get out of the house. When Noori gave birth to her own child, who’s now in college, she recalls feeling isolated. “I remember the first time I got to go out to the grocery store. I thought it was wonderful,” she laughs.

So in her prenatal/postnatal yoga

class, she likes to create a sense of community. The moms bring their babies to class, and Noori has everyone introduce themselves so that students get to know one another. Inevitably, the women begin to talk about what’s going on in their lives, in their bodies, and with their babies. And many become friends.

With her private practice, Heifetz works to address women’s need for a little time with their partner, giving couples a unique opportunity to practice yoga together at home. And with a new baby in the house, this is sometimes the only activity they have the chance to do together. “It’s just so important to have that time of quiet,” says Heifetz, adding that one pair of students even tends to hold hands during spinal twists.

Yoga For Life

Whether it’s couple time, or mom by herself, taking that time to get grounded and restored is essential for new moms. “They cannot ignore themselves,” says Heifetz. “It just doesn’t work.”

And the practice, and benefits, of yoga extend far beyond the mat, Noori explains. It helps build you up both physically and emotionally, so that you are ready for challenges from lifting your new carseat into and out of the car, to making an important decision about your child’s college fund.

It can also extend far beyond your pregnancy and recovery, helping you prepare for whatever comes next – from your next pregnancy to leaping back into the workforce. “You are going to need this strength and the calming of the nervous system,” Noori says, “to maintain the quality of life.” ♥

Christina Elston is managing editor of L.A. Parent.