



## Practicing Pregnant

*"Instead of thinking about all of the things that 'could' go wrong, I am focused on the miracle of life growing inside me."* Leigh Taylor Wells

I am seven and a half months pregnant and I still practice yoga every day. Now several years into my yoga practice, I still remember that when I first began my practice, I immediately recognized that the health benefits far exceeded any other workout routine. My body toned, my skin glowed, my breathing remained calm (even through stressful situations), and I was happier. Today these benefits still ring true for me and so now when I am frequently told "You look amazing... You don't even look pregnant except for your belly," "You're glowing" or "You are so lucky," my response is, "Yes, I am blessed, because pregnancy is a miracle." But I know that it's not "luck" to feel and look the way I do in my third trimester, it's due to **my dedication to a fulfilling yoga practice.**

I have noticed amazing **physical** differences between this pregnancy and my first pregnancy several years ago (pre-yoga). During my first pregnancy I had a lot of difficulty getting comfortable in bed, and frequently had insomnia due to both this discomfort and a racing mind that would not stop. I was exhausted, frequently needed to sleep, and had little or no energy. During my third trimester, I had pain when I walked because of sciatica issues. With this pregnancy, practicing 60-90 minutes of power yoga every day, I sometimes forget that I am pregnant! I sleep comfortably, well, and straight through the night. I have no loss of energy, no mood-swings, no aches or pains in my body, and *no insomnia*. In fact, my daily yoga practice has so energized me that my sleep patterns have not changed much, if at all from before I was pregnant. All of this I credit to my daily yoga practice, and the principles and benefits of yoga.

Another concern for pregnant women is **weight gain** during pregnancy, and understandably so. It's strange and can feel scary to have your body change in ways which are frankly impossible to describe, unless you've gone through it. For this reason, pregnancy requires total surrender, another parallel to a yoga practice. Practicing yoga helps you to learn to let go. To *totally surrender* and let go of the illusion of control. This is very helpful when you are pregnant and this type of surrender is essential.

In addition, a regular yoga practice during

pregnancy makes you naturally gravitate toward the foods that your body, and your growing baby's needs. All you need to do is simply get quiet and listen from within, and the answers will be clear. I have found that my tastes and nutritional needs change frequently, sometimes daily. For several weeks in my first trimester I ate steak three times a day and couldn't even look at a vegetable. Then there was a dairy phase, all I wanted was dairy (I did not eat dairy before I was pregnant). Then, of course, there was the cheeseburger phase...well done with mayonnaise. People are sometimes surprised to hear me say this, because they assume that all yogis are vegetarian. I eat what my baby and my body need, without succumbing to labels or dogmatism.

**Emotionally**, a regular yoga practice dissipates fear and balances the practitioner, whether you are pregnant or not. I've especially noticed that during this pregnancy I am rarely—if ever—consumed by all of those fearful thoughts and worries which plague just about every pregnant woman I have known or read about. Instead of thinking about all of the things that "could" go wrong, instead of succumbing to the raging hormones can wreak on a woman's emotions and general sense of well-being during pregnancy, **I am and remain focused on the miracle of life growing inside me. Even with several changes in my life**, (releasing our first yoga video, traveling to Paris for our belated honeymoon, living with friends for six weeks due to major house construction, taking our daughter to Disney and enduring 18 hour days of Mickey Mouse and Space Mountain), my emotions remained and still remain incredibly calm, relaxed and grounded.

Many practitioners, friends and strangers ask me all the time what they can do to achieve this state during their pregnancy, and afterwards. Here's my advice: **Roll out your mat**: If there is one thing I urge pregnant women to do, it is to be proud of your pregnancy and your body. **We are creating life...this is an incredibly powerful and beautiful thing!!** So in order to ensure that it is a healthy and enjoyable experience for mother and child alike, experience first-hand the transformational effects that yoga will have on your body, your mind, your spirit, and your pregnancy!! You will literally rewire your mind and body to gravitate towards peace and joy with every breath.

Now if all of this sounds great, but you are thinking "I just don't have the time to practice yoga..." I have three words for you: yes, you do. In fact, you don't have the time *not* to practice yoga. **Yoga will so calm and focus your mind that you will become that much more efficient in your life, which will more than make up for the time on your mat.** Do not underestimate the effects of a regular yoga practice on your relationships. A calm, happy

person shines her light to the world, and to her partner and family, and so life and love is more joyful. Just ask my husband and my daughter!

**Now get started.** Remember, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step" (Lao-tzu), so take that first step and begin with the **BREATH**, or Pranyama as it is called in Sanskrit. Breath is a huge part of a yoga practice. By focusing on breathing calmly, inhaling and filling your lungs completely and exhaling even longer, you keep your heart rate low and empower yourself to get through just about anything calmly and easily...**even labor!** You are literally training yourself to approach situations, and life, effortlessly. This will make you an even better mother after your baby is born.

Next, it's important that you find a practice that works for you and your baby. If you cannot make it to a regular practice, here are two simple poses which I recommend that are wonderful for easing lower back pressure, strain and aches.

1. **Rag Doll:** step to the front of your mat, bring your feet hip-width apart and hinge forward at your hips with soft knees. Bring opposite hand to opposite elbow, and let your head hang heavy. make sure that you bend your knees a lot. This pose will release tension from your lower back and lengthen your spine—which is the center of life!!

2. **Child's Pose:** another back tension reliever!! bring your knees to the edges of your mat and your big toes together and fold forward with your arms extended in front of you, palms flat to the mat. Rest your forehead on the mat, or rest your head to one side.

When you do find a practice that works for you, please be mindful of **poses to avoid** when pregnant: *Abdominals* and any pose lying on your belly, *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (wheel), *Shoulder Stand*, *Halasana* (plough), *Karnapidasana*, and any other pose that your intuition tells you to avoid. Listen to that voice! *It is always right.*

Every mom wants her baby to be healthy, happy and strong. Start now cultivating a wonderful, peaceful and healthy environment for your little one with yoga. My unborn baby loves when I practice and teach and especially loves when we chant "(m)om."

*Leigh Taylor Wells and her husband Philippe Wells, are co-owners of Prana Power Yoga located in Newton, Massachusetts. Prana is based on the principles of Vinyasa Yoga (A form of Yoga that is based on a series of flowing postures usually, and in this case, done in a room deliberately heated to 90+ degrees.) Prana Power Yoga offers a powerful sequence of flowing yoga postures designed to provide a full workout for body and soul. Taylor brings to her yoga teaching a wealth of experience from her life-long commitment to physical and spiritual wellness. She has experienced the transformational effects of yoga in her own life, and applies the knowledge she has gained to her own engaging teaching style. Prana Power Yoga is located at 282 Centre Street, Newton, Massachusetts. [www.PranaPowerYoga.com](http://www.PranaPowerYoga.com)*