

## **Key Components For A PRENATAL CLASS FORMAT** **by SOYA Faculty Lalita (Natasha) Scott**

The 3 R's to labour are Ritual, Relaxation, and Rhythm. Yoga can offer all of these perfectly to a prenatal student. Here is what we will cover in the 300hr upgrade.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION AND CONNECTION**

A wonderful thing about creating talks in classes is that people get to share their wisdom. If you can create a safe, loving environment, chances are you will be amazed by what students will share with each other.

### **8 Major Themes:**

Share your personal experiences with these themes if you have some. This will greatly enhance the conversation (but not to worry if you have nothing to add.)

#### **1) HOW THE BODY IS CHANGING:**

(if possible, have a picture for the break down to see how the body changes). Be aware of hair, swellings, breasts, backs, feet, hips, pelvic floor, acne, weird unexplainable things, insomnia, constipation, bladder control, expectations, sleep, nausea.....

#### **2) PROFOUND LETTING GO:**

(this will be different in each term). Be aware of, independence, sleep, food, body image, jobs, friends, self identity, fear, anxiety, birth plans.....

#### **3) DEPRESSION/ANXIETY**

(possibly a longer talk). If possible, draw on an awesome local resource for this. Be prepared for stunning beautiful honesty and perhaps some tears. Many women are currently working with either depression or anxiety and are medicated. Many have suffered some form of this in the past, and many will find themselves struggling at some point in the future. Talk about prenatal depression. Often women think that they should be shiny happy and glowing their entire pregnancy, and can't understand why they are a little out of wack when the hormones take over.

It's NORMAL, if there is such a thing.

#### **Talk about BABY BLUES:**

The baby blues are thought to be linked to hormonal changes that happen during the week after giving birth. Our body has some major adjustments to make, which may include coming down from the adrenaline high that you felt when your baby was born. Pregnancy hormones gradually leave the body just as the body starts producing breast milk. The appetite may change, though its not just physical changes that are happening. Emotions are likely to be put through the wringer, too. The new sense of responsibility that comes with having a baby can be overwhelming. It would be good to have an open discussion about Postpartum depression.

#### **4) PAIN REMEDIES:**

Share information about the many kinds of pain remedies for labor including and beyond pharmaceutical drugs. Talk about "MOTHERING THE MOTHER", and why Doula's are so incredibly important and why dads and partners need to know how important they are.

#### **5) C-SECTION BIRTHS**

Many women will skip this section of their books, because they don't want a C section. Currently rates in Canada are just under 1 in 3. Women need to educate and empower themselves. C-section births save lives, but there is no need for this number to be this high.



## 6) BREAST FEEDING:

There are not any cons to breastfeeding. However there is a lot of pressure for women to breast feed. "Breast is the Best", and not all woman have this ability. For this part of the discussion it is nice not only to talk about the pro's of breast feeding but to discuss what can be done if you are not able to breast feed.

## 7) POSTPARTUM CARE

This topic can be of massive value as often women are more concerned about Pre natal than Post. Don't let care and rest stop the minute you get home. The body goes through unexpected changes, such as sweating a great deal and hair loss. Hot flashes are part of the readjustment during this time.

## 8) MISCARRIAGE

This topic can be surprisingly full! 1 in 6 women have miscarriages. Most miscarriages happen around the 3rd month of pregnancy due to the placenta taking over. Many women will not even let anyone know that they are pregnant before the first Trimester is over. It is your choice whether you will allow women in the First Trimester into your Prenatal Yoga Class. Some women are very eager and excited and want to join Prenatal Yoga as soon as they find out they are pregnant. Be clear about what happens in the 3rd month. My theory is if you have not told anyone you are pregnant and then you miscarry, who is your support team? It is a very real grief - for some as big a loss as birthing a Still Born.

### **Pranayama For Prenatal:**

The Breath is your constant companion, it is your number one tool for calming you nervous system, especially if you start to feel anxiety.

#### FULL BODY Breath

#### WHOLE-BODY BREATH

DIRGHA BREATH on both the front side and the back side of the body.

ANULOMA VILOMA (alternate nostril breath) Prenatal Version

#### **Modified Alternate Nostril Breathing for Pregnancy**

Sit in a comfortable position, either in an easy crossed legged position, or bringing soles of the feet to touch.

You can use a blanket or block to raise the hips higher than the knees. Lift through the crown of your head, and root through your seat.

Bring both hands to the knees, with palms facing upwards and open to the sky.

As you inhale, begin to gently close the left hand, leaving the right hand open.

As you exhale, begin to close the right hand, and open the left.

Continue this sequence between left and right sides for about five minutes.

Be mindful not to hold the breath, but simply to let the breath flow, bringing nourishing oxygenated breath to both you and your baby.

*"With this modification, we still receive the benefits of intentional breathing and balance without adding any unnecessary stress to the mama-to-be." Logan Kelly*

If women are up in the middle of the night, get them to lie on their right side and that will help clear the left nostril and slow the nervous system down. Or, sit propped-up in bed and block the right nostril, breathing through the left side only until they want to fall asleep, usually no longer that 30 minutes.

Use the Hasta Mudras for Pranayama: CHIN, CHIN MAYA, ADHI, BRAHMA (see pages 109-111 in *Letters from the Yoga Masters* for information on these Mudras)

### **Vocal Toning and Mantra:**

\*open throat = open birth canal

\*increases the length and depth of the exhalations

\*sound vibrations also carry tension out of the body

- \*relaxing
- \*the sound helps calm and focus mind and body
- \*helpful tool to cope with labor contractions
- \*helps to let go of anxiety

### **Pelvic Floor Toning:**

Pelvic floor toning is extremely important for all women, but especially during their Pregnancy.

### **Trimester Breakdown For Asanas:**

*If it doesn't feel right it isn't. SIMPLE. There are millions of asana's you, can find one that works well for your student, or if rest is what is needed please always have the option of rest.*

Modifying one's yoga practice in the first trimester can seem a bit odd to some since to the outsider, there is little visible physical change. But the body is undergoing huge changes. The body's focus is on implantation of the fetus and proper attachment of the placenta. This stage of pregnancy is considered the most delicate because the risk of miscarriage is at its highest (until the 3 month mark). This stage of pregnancy is where your students can feel extremely tired. In fact it may be the MOST tired out of all 3 trimesters. Which may be why you won't meet a lot of your students until the second trimester when their energy picks up. Always allow the mammas to come to shavasana whenever they feel like, even if it's the whole class. For some it's a way of rest in a world that wants us to be busy. For other's its connection time with this baby, especially if there are other children at home.

### **FIRST TRIMESTER:**

**Prone poses:** generally ok.

**Bhujangasana** (cobra pose) is fine as long as the practitioner is grounding the pubic bone and elongating through the lower back and actively using her legs, the lower belly is not getting direct pressure. The uterus is very well protected. Woman will know when this becomes uncomfortable. In a prenatal class full of woman in different trimesters you would not offer prone asana's. However if a first term momma showed up in one of your regular classes that would be fine.

**Dhanurasana** (bow pose) and **Salambhasana** (locust pose) both put direct pressure on the uterus and should be avoided.

**Deep twists:** This family of asanas is wonderfully therapeutic for the body since it provides an excellent means of compressing the internal organs which stimulates and cleanses the organs (especially if women are feeling constipated). The uterus is still fairly small and situated in the pelvis. It is recommend to avoid deep belly twists. Instead focus on twists of the upper back, keeping the belly button facing forward.

**Contraindicated Poses to Avoid:** Deep backbends should also be approached with caution since they too, compress the uterus and can over stretch the abdominal muscles.

Jumps and jerky movements can disturb implantation.

Abdominal strengtheners should be avoided. Prenatal Yoga is not the time to start a vigorous workout. Please do not teach this.

### **SECOND TRIMESTER:**

"As long as a teacher understands the anatomical and physiological changes of the pregnant body, and what's safe and not safe, you can really teach a well-rounded class," says Flashenberg. "I don't have a problem with asking these students to hold a pose for a few breaths, feeling the sensation and breathing

into it. As long as you watch the students and listen to their breathing, it's okay to challenge them in a safe manner. Flashhenberg

**Seated Asanas:** All of the seated asana's are great for prep for labor. They are an opening of the pelvis and a use of gravity, a great friend during labor. The more they are practiced the more likely they will be remembered!

**Sukasana:** Seated with length through the spine, creating space for both mom and babe. Here you can practice neck opening, side body opening, chest openings, open spinal twists and spinal rotations which are a lovely release for the lower back and hips.

**Seated forward bends:** When moving into seated forward bends it is lovely to remind students that all forward bends are a place of introspection. The ability to go inward and connect to their inherent rhythm. Often when labor begins it is very exciting, it's a beautiful opportunity to start being in tune with it right from the start. Seated forward bends are great for opening up the back body. The bigger the front body becomes the tighter the back body gets. Creating space here with awareness, movement and breath. Remember with all seated forward folds you will need to offer space for the baby by creating space with the body.

**Inversions: Down Dog:** This can feel like an amazing opening for the back body, however if heart burn is present then offer the modification of Dog on the Wall. Down Dog is a great asana to place in a prenatal ladies pocket if labor is going to fast! Anything anti gravity (bum up to sky) will help slow labor down.

**Side Body:** Side body work is wonderful for hip warming, quad lengthening, and for getting used to being on their side with the legs open (as an amazing option for birth).

**Standing poses:** Standing poses are wonderful for the ladies to remember during labor as once again it's a great way to work with gravity (speed labor up). Walking alone can be great during labor. Here are few that are wonderful to interweave through your class:

**Utthita Trikonasana** [Extended Triangle Pose] great for opening up the sciatica, and learning how to breathe into the intercostal muscles (secondary breathing muscles) that are very important as internal space becomes limited.

**Utthita Parsvakonasana** [Extended Side Angle Pose] Hip openings and working with the pelvic floor have awareness of how each student feels when you check in at the beginning of each class.

**Virabhadrasana I and II** [Warrior I and II Poses]

**Utkatasana** [Chair Pose] and balance poses such as **Vrksasana** (Tree Pose)

**Ardha Chandrasana** (Half Moon Pose) lovely with the wall as well.

**Virabhadrasana III** (Warrior III Pose)

All these asanas are great for building strength in the legs and increasing circulation to prevent swelling in the feet and ankles (Edema). For standing balancing asanas feel free to offer the wall for support.

**NOTE:** Wide-legged standing poses, like Virabhadrasana II, put a lot of strain on the pelvic floor, and it's already strained. If students come in saying that their pelvic floor feels strained you can modify by offering a better asana for them at this time.

**Spinal Drumming:** At the end of a standing series it is a treat to offer spinal drumming not only along the sides of the spine but down the sides of the legs if the ladies feel comfortable with this. It helps to get energy free flowing and releases tighter muscles.

**Chest Openers:** These can feel lovely especially as the chest is getting larger and the back is getting tighter. These are great to remind women to do postnatal as often the muscles in the back get rounded and over stretched from hours of feeding baby.

**Gentle Back Bends:** These help elongate the front side of the body, creating space for baby and lengthening the energy lines for calming nausea.

**Legs Up The Wall:** Legs up the wall can feel absolutely amazing for everyone!! Especially prenatal ladies. Their hips (along with their entire body) are shifting and changing all the time and this

gives the legs and feet a break. The spine against the floor helps to calm the nervous system. Recirculation of the blood through the legs helps with varicose veins, and the anti gravity on the feet helps any edema in the feet or ankles.

**Contraindicated Poses to Avoid:**

NO PRONE ASANAS, CLOSED TWISTS, DEEP BACK BENDS

Enjoy the energy of this trimester by teaching to modify favourite poses, or to substitute similar ones, so she can still get the satisfaction of the stretch while acknowledging the changes to her body. Show her how the practice can deepen with close attention to how she arranges herself; she can still build strength and endurance while protecting her joints and growing belly.

**THIRD TRIMESTER:**

The space you create for women in their third trimester is a place of grounding and centering. A place of safety and community, so much so, that many women will choose to be there with you in this space as far as 2-4 cm dilated!

Women often feel tired again - if so encourage them to rest.

Fear and anxiety can arise as they get closer to their due date, so offer love, compassion, meditation, and pranayama, asanas for grounding, mudras for emotional balance. Remind women that the whole point of this is so that they can learn to listen to their own bodies. If something does not feel right, it isn't! Whether there is a story attached to it, or not, they should listen to their own bodies - it is the greatest gift you can offer.

**Relaxin:** remember that the hormone RELAXIN may be making their joints a little unstable, so not staying in asanas too long.

**Blood pressure** may be changing quite a lot, so from here on it is best not to be holding the hands above the head in asanas.

**Emphasize pranayama over asana.** In the last trimester, intense focus is a talent to cultivate. Include hip and chest openers, alignment, and relaxation poses in the practice. Encourage breathwork in preparation for labor.

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**RELAXATION**

Relaxation is the key to labor. This will help to create the ability to relax enough to breathe the baby out. A longer Shavasana, guided mediation and breathing techniques will be beneficial.