

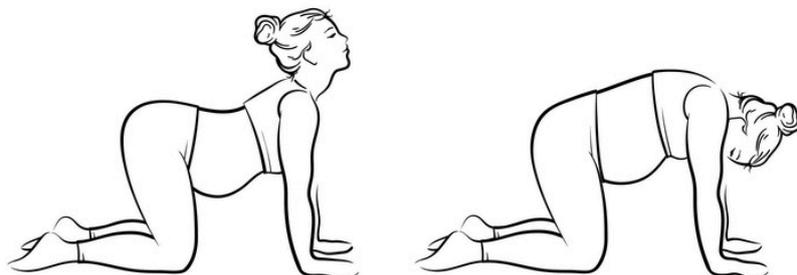


# Yoga for Birth Preparation and Postpartum

The following yoga postures and breathing exercises are provided by Melissa Kushnaryov. Melissa is a certified yoga instructor specializing in prenatal and postnatal yoga, and the author of a book called *Treading Water, Holding Weights: Tackling and Embracing the Chaos of Motherhood*. These postures are intended to help you find a sense of release and relaxation.

Please note: If they cause pain or significant physical discomfort, please stop immediately. If you are new to yoga, please consult with your prenatal care provider to ensure this practice is appropriate for you.

Prenatal yoga poses: The following four postures are intended to help women maintain strength and flexibility as their bodies grow quickly, while also preparing them for the birthing process.



*Cat Cow*

**Benefits:** Stretches hips and abdomen, cultivates connection to breath, strengthens spine, improves balance.

**Cues:**

1. Come onto your hands and knees. Your hands and knees should both be hip-width distance apart. Stack shoulders over wrists, hips over knees.
2. As you inhale, release your belly down to the earth. Lift your chin and chest as you gaze up towards the ceiling.
3. As you exhale, round your back up towards the ceiling, bringing your belly towards your spine. Allow your head to hang towards the earth.
4. Repeat four more times, moving between the postures with each inhale and exhale.

## Standing Forward Bend Pose (Uttanasana)



*Standing forward Bend*

Benefits: Stretches hamstrings, releases neck, strengthens thighs, reduces anxiety.

Cues:

1. Come to a standing position, dispersing your weight evenly on both feet.
2. Take a deep inhale.
3. On your exhale, bend forward at the hips, coming into a forward fold.
4. Maintain a long torso, a soft bend in the knees, and a slight anterior pelvic tilt.
5. Release the head down towards the earth.
6. Allow your arms and shoulders to relax.
7. Hold for five full inhales and exhales.

## Seated Side Stretch (Parsva Sukhasana)



*Seated Side Stretch*

**Benefits:** Stretches neck, shoulders, back, and obliques.

**Cues:**

1. Begin in a seated position with your legs crossed, which is known as Easy Pose.
2. Release your arms down by your sides.
3. On your inhale, reach your right arm up towards the ceiling.
4. On your exhale, lean your torso over to your left side, reaching your right arm to corner of the ceiling.
5. As you do so, open your chest towards the ceiling. Focus on creating a long line rather than a sharp bend.
6. Keep your right hip rooted down to the earth.
7. Take five full breaths and then switch sides.
8. Repeat three times on each side.

## Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana)



*Bound Angle Pose*

**Benefits:** Strengthens spine, relaxes pelvic floor, helps to position pelvis for birthing process.

**Cues:**

1. Begin in a seated position.
2. Bring the bottoms of the feet together in front of you with your knees out to the side.
3. Place your hands around your feet or ankles.
4. Gently move your knees down towards the ground.
5. Reach the crown of your head up towards the ceiling.
6. Release the shoulders back and down towards the earth.
7. If you want to go further in this pose, bend at the hips, moving your forehead down towards your feet.
8. Hold for 10 seconds.

**Birth recovery yoga poses:** The following are three yoga postures and a breathing exercise for newly postpartum mothers (2-6 weeks after giving birth).

The weeks immediately following delivery are a time for mothers to completely rest and relax. The body is healing. Hormones are shifting. The following postures and breathing exercises are intended to be completely restorative. At no time should they cause any strain or discomfort.

## Supported Seated Forward Bend (Supported Paschimottanasana)



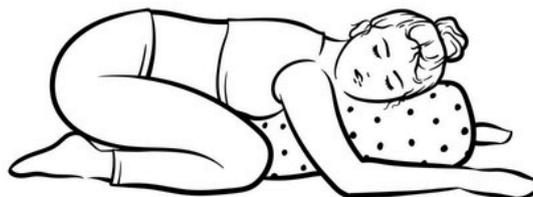
*Supported Seated forward Bend*

**Benefits:** Stretches back and hamstrings, relieves stress and anxiety.

**Cues:**

1. Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you.
2. Place one or two pillows on your thighs.
3. Slowly fold at the hips, bringing your belly and forehead down to the pillows.
4. Adjust the pillows so that your belly feels fully supported and your forehead is able to rest comfortably on the second pillow without any strain.
5. Close your eyes and breathe naturally.
6. Hold for 2 minutes.

## Supported Child's Pose (Supported Balasana)



*Supported Child's pose*

**Benefits:** Stretches hips, relieves back pain, calms body and mind.

**Cues:**

1. Come to your hands and knees.
2. Bring your knees a little wider than your hips and your big toes together.
3. Place a stack of pillows or blankets between your knees.
4. Slowly release your hips down to your heels.
5. Bring your torso down onto the stack of pillows or blankets.
6. Rest either cheek on the stack of pillows or blankets.
7. Close your eyes and breathe naturally.
8. Hold for 2 minutes.

## Breathing Exercise



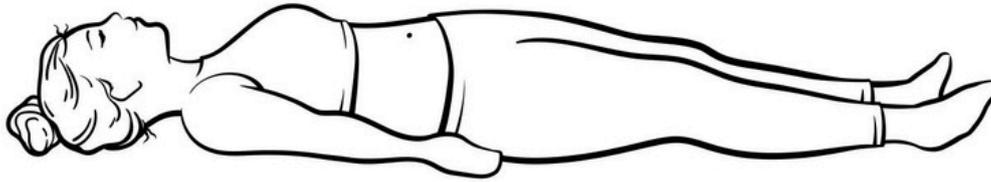
### *Breathing Exercise*

**Benefits:** Relaxes muscles, relieves tension, can help with anxiety and depression.

**Cues:**

1. Lie comfortably on your back.
2. Place one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest.
3. As you inhale, feel your chest expand and your belly rise.
4. As you exhale, draw your navel towards your spine and feel your chest release down.
5. Continue to take full inhaled and full exhaled, counting to four on each inhale and four on each exhale.
6. Repeat for 10 breaths.

## Corpse Pose (Savasana)



*Corpse Pose*

**Benefits:** Completely relaxes the entire body, allows the mind to slow down.

**Cues:**

1. Lie down on your back.
2. Completely relax every muscle in your body.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Rest your arms a few inches away from your body, palms facing up.
5. Bring your feet a little wider than your hips, and let them flop open.
6. Breathe naturally.
7. Lie in this position for 3-5 minutes.

**Postpartum yoga poses:** These next four postures are for postpartum mothers cleared by a medical professional for exercise (6-8 weeks or more after giving birth).

Once a mother has been cleared by a medical professional to resume physical activity, she can engage in a more active yoga practice. But the following postures are not intended to be rigorous. These yoga poses are geared towards a more relaxing practice. They will help to stretch and release some of the muscles that tend to get tight from breastfeeding, holding a baby, and other activities that can cause aches and pains for moms.

## Cow Face Pose (Gomukhasana)



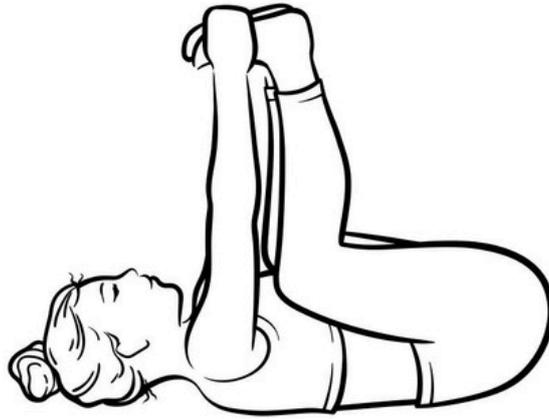
*Cow face pose*

Benefits: Stretches hips, thighs, shoulders, arms, and chest.

Cues:

1. Sit on the ground with your legs straight in front of you.
2. Bend your knees and bring the bottoms of your feet to the ground.
3. Slide your right foot under your left knee to the outside of the left hip.
4. Cross your left leg over your right leg so that your knees are stacked on top of each other.
5. Reach your right arm straight up and bend at the elbow so that your right hand reaches behind your back. Keep your right bicep close to your ear and your right elbow pointing upwards.
6. Reach your left arm down behind you and bend at the elbow so that your left hand is reaching up towards your right hand. Keep your left bicep close to your body and your left elbow pointing down. Use a towel to connect your hands if they do not reach each other on their own.
7. Hold for 10 breaths and then switch sides.

## Happy Baby Pose (Ananda Balasana)



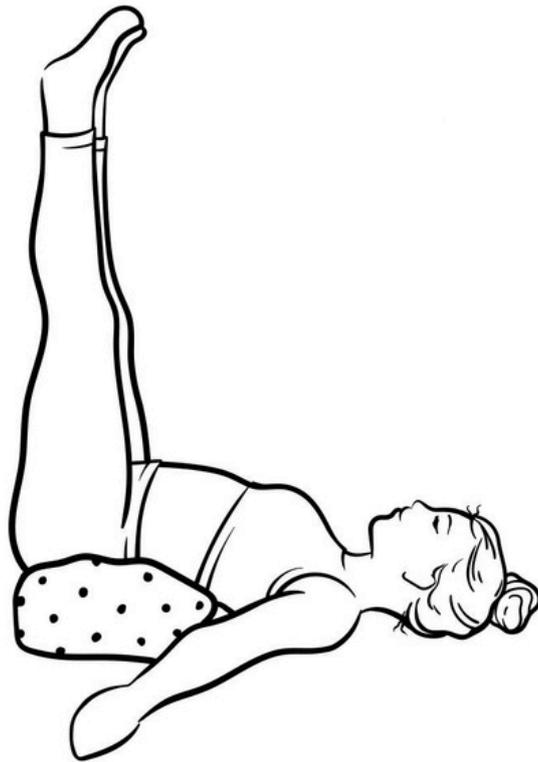
*Happy Baby Pose*

Benefits: Releases lower back, opens hips and groin, stretches hamstrings.

Cues:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent.
2. Keep your knees bent while you raise your feet up towards the ceiling.
3. Move your hands between your knees and up towards your feet, grasping each foot on the outside of the foot.
4. Gently draw your feet down towards your shoulders with your hands while gently pushing up into the hands with the feet. You will feel a push-pull sensation.
5. Slowly rock from side to side if it feels good.
6. Hold for five breaths.

## Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose (Viparita Karani)



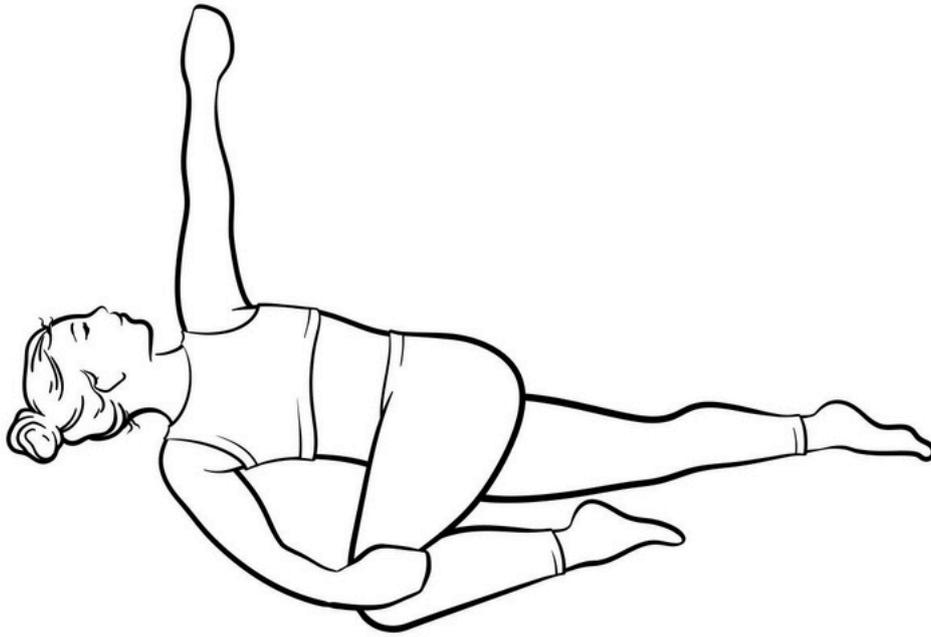
*Leg-up-the-Wall pose*

**Benefits:** Flushes lymph and other fluids from legs and reproductive area, relieves lower-back pain, boosts energy.

**Cues:**

1. Place a short, firm stack of folded blankets against the wall as a support.
2. Sit sideways on the stack of blankets with your entire left side up against the wall.
3. Slide your right foot under your left knee to the outside of the left hip.
4. Cross your left leg over your right leg so that your knees are stacked on top of each other.
5. In one careful movement, swing your legs up onto the wall and your shoulders and head lightly down onto the floor.
6. Adjust the height of the support and the distance from the wall if needed.
7. Extend your legs up the wall, keeping them relatively firm.
8. Release the shoulders down towards the earth and close your eyes.
9. Hold for 10 breaths.

## Supine Twist (Supine Matsyendrasana)



*Supine twist*

**Benefits:** Lengthens and realigns the spine, improves digestion, releases lower back.

**Cues:**

1. Lie down on your back with your legs straight and your arms at your side.
2. Draw your right leg up and hug your knee into your chest.
3. Place your right arm on the ground.
4. Use your left arm to draw your right leg across your body, coming into a twist.
5. Keep your right shoulder firm on the ground.
6. Gaze over your right shoulder.
7. Hold for 10 breaths.
8. Repeat on the other side.

Illustrations by Kara Yoder