

How yoga can help you conceive

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yoga for conception

Stress can impede conception because it ties up so much of our vital energy – and this is detrimental. If stress is claiming energy for keeping our muscles uptight, our minds on overload and our emotions all churned up, the other systems of the body have to manage on the energy that is left over. If conception is eluding you, stress is the most likely culprit. Indeed, long-term stress can even cause medical problems that require medical solutions. Regular yoga practice is a simple preventative measure and can also be a cure. It increases your energy supply and channels it to all the body's systems to keep them in balance so that you become fit and relaxed, living each moment to the full.

what your body language tells you

The way you sit, stand and move can reveal a lot about your state of mind, health and emotional well-being at any time. If most of your energy is tied up either in your mind (your work, for example), in your emotions (say, problems that may be weighing on your mind) or in your hectic lifestyle, your body becomes depleted. There just may not be enough energy left over to work your reproductive system properly. It can be as simple as that. This stress can be reflected in your body language – legs tightly crossed, upper spine hunched over, or arms crossed over your chest.

“This state, in which the senses are steady and at rest, is known as yoga, the state of union.”

Katha Upanishad VI 9

The yogic answer to stress is to rebalance your nervous and endocrine systems so that all functions are enhanced. Use yoga to stretch, strengthen, open and relax. This releases locked-up energy, and so eases conception, pregnancy and birth.



△ The “uptight” body language here says it all. This posture displays feelings of fear and vulnerability. The arms and legs form a shield across the trunk, blocking the flow of energy. The chest and abdomen are closed, so that breathing is restricted and energy to the pelvic area is blocked.



△ The body language here shows a relaxed mind, peaceful emotions and an erect, vibrant spine. The shoulders, neck, hips and pelvis are relaxed so that energy can flow freely throughout the body.

breath is the key

The respiratory and cardiovascular systems bring oxygen (the prime source of energy) into the body from the outside air and circulate it to every cell. Good breathing habits, therefore, increase the total supply of energy available for the body's systems to use. The diaphragm is the large muscle that separates the abdomen from the chest cavity. It is the chief breathing muscle. If its movement is restricted through poor posture it cannot pump enough air into the lungs and so not enough oxygen is available to the body. Shallow breathing, which does not draw in enough oxygen, is one of the main causes of feeling below par. Deep breathing (using the diaphragm fully) is instantly energizing.

As you breathe in, the diaphragm contracts strongly downwards, massaging and energizing the abdominal organs and increasing lung capacity so that air rushes in, through the nose, from outside. The diaphragm springs back up again as you breathe out, releasing the abdominal pressure and decreasing the lung capacity so that air is forced out through the nose. This

contraction and release reflects the whole momentum of yoga – activity followed by rest, followed by activity, in a continuous, balanced cycle. Practised with awareness,

deep breathing reconnects us with this rhythm of life and helps us to learn how to relax deeply between all bouts of activity. It also helps to create a calm strength.

5 Tuning in to your breath

A deep breath in recharges both body and mind. A deep breath out releases muscular tension, chemical waste products and tired, strained feelings. Mentally, take your breath in to the very base of your spine. Taking time to practise breathing slowly, deeply and fully induces calm, positive feelings.



◁ Sit at the back of a firm chair with spine erect, knees apart and feet on the floor. Rest your hands with palms up in an open, receptive gesture. This position opens the trunk, so the diaphragm can move freely. Take several deep breaths with awareness of what is happening to your body as you breathe. Repeat the exercise frequently.

CAUTION

Deep breathing is strenuous, especially if it is new to you. Stop at once if you feel tired, breathless or light-headed. Rest for a while before starting again. Very gradually build up the number of deep breaths you take at any one time.

6 Flexibility in the pelvis

The reproductive system lies within the lower part of the abdomen and is protected by the bony pelvic girdle. This area needs to be open and relaxed so that energy can circulate freely through the reproductive system and conception is unhindered. Regular movement of the pelvis brings energy, flexibility and strength to this area.



◁ 1 Sit on the edge of a sturdy chair with feet apart and set firmly on the floor. Place your hands on your thighs above your knees, with fingers turned in and elbows turned out. Lean forward, bend your elbows and take your upper body weight on your thighs. This frees the pelvis – think of it as a bowl and tip it forward at the front “rim” (the pubic bone) and up at the back “rim” (where the sacrum joins the spine).

▷ 2 Open the front of the body by spreading your arms with palms up, lifting your chest and tucking your pelvis under so that the front pelvic “rim” rises and the back “rim” is lowered. This movement stretches the spine and releases tension. It also tightens the lower abdominal muscles that hold the pelvis in place. Repeat these two movements several times and practise frequently in order to increase mobility in the pelvic area.



Yoga poses to release tension

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For many people, tension settles in the pelvic region, causing stiffness in the hips, pain in the lower back, and general congestion and an uptight feeling in the lower abdominal area. Yoga stretches relieve all these conditions and allow energy to circulate freely. They also work on the whole body, so remember to keep the spine extended and the chest open in all these exercises.

CAUTION

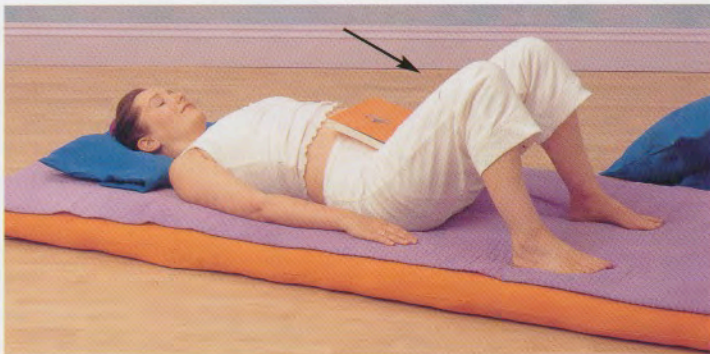
Make haste slowly. Locked-in tension impedes movement. As you release the tension through yoga movements, you will find it easier to move much further. All yoga stretching should be performed with active relaxation and not force.

7 Pelvic movements with focused awareness

These relaxing movements encourage increased awareness, blood flow and flexibility in the pelvic area. Feel that you are opening up to new healing energy and letting go of any tension there.



◁ 1 Lie on your back, with a large book and three cushions beside you. Place one cushion under your head and tuck your chin in to lengthen the back of your neck. Bend your knees and plant your feet hip-width apart on the floor. Place the book on your lower abdomen, so that it is evenly balanced upon the hip bones and the pubic bone, then stretch your arms alongside your body with the palms down to support you.



△ 2 As you breathe in press on your hands and arch your lower back as much as you can, so that the navel and hip bones rise and the front "rim" of your pelvis (and the book) is tipped towards your feet.



△ 3 As you breathe out pull the navel against the spine and press on your hands to lift the coccyx just off the floor, so that the pelvic front "rim" (and the book) is now tipped backward, towards your head. Keep your waist against the floor and move the lower spine only. Repeat steps 1-3 several times.



△ 4 Now place your hands, in a relaxed pose, on top of the book and breathe deeply. Feel the movements of the book over the pelvic area as you breathe in and out slowly for several minutes.



△ 5 Remove the book and bring the soles of your feet together so that your knees fall outward. Support them with the remaining two cushions. Place your hands, palms up, beside you in a gesture of openness and complete surrender. Relax for several minutes.

8 Seated looseners

Let your partner encourage and help you. It is fun and relaxing for both of you. The closeness of trying to conceive can permeate all aspects of your life together.



△ 1 Sit on the floor with legs extended and feet apart. Bend your right knee and bring your foot to rest against your left inner thigh, with your heel close to the pubic bone. Flex your left ankle and straighten your left knee. Raise your right arm overhead and stretch up through your right side, breathing in.



△ 2 Breathe out as you lean to the left over your left leg, with your left arm sliding gently along your leg and your right arm stretching up. Breathe in as you sit up, lowering your right arm. Breathe out as you bend to the right, walking your hands along the floor each side of your bent right leg.



△ 3 Keep the left ankle flexed and stretch right through your left side as you bend over your right leg. Breathe in as you sit up straight. Repeat these movements a few times on the same side. Then breathe naturally as you change legs and repeat the movements with the left knee bent.

9 Happy womb poses

It is important to focus your attention in the lower abdomen and to create space there in order to bring more energy to the reproductive system. Sit on the floor or a chair and open your hips, with your knees wide apart, as often as possible. You can sit comfortably on the floor to read, talk on the phone, watch TV and do most of those things you normally do sitting in a chair – except that in a chair the pelvic area is apt to be constricted, especially if you cross your legs.



◁ 1 Lie on your back, bend your knees and hold one knee in each hand. Keeping your chin tucked down and your waist against the floor (using the abdominal muscles), rotate your knees outwards with your hands, relaxing and opening the hip joints. Circle the knees out and in again for a few moments, several times a day.



△ 2 Sit upright with your legs loosely crossed and a scarf around your middle, crossed over at the abdomen. As you breathe out pull the scarf ends loosely to create pressure. Breathe in deeply against this pressure to open the scarf and bring the breathing movements down into the lower abdomen and pelvic floor. Continue for several minutes.



△ 3 Sit with your knees bent and your feet apart and flat on the floor. Now bring your palms together with bent elbows. Keeping your chest open, gently press your elbows against your inner thighs for a few moments to open the hip joints. Breathe slowly and deeply.



△ 4 Remaining seated, lean forward and place your hands on the floor with palms upwards. Gently press your knees apart with your upper arms. Breathe deeply, lengthening the out breath for as long as you can.

Sharing energy with your partner

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Do you lack quality time with your partner? It may be that you are both so busy that you hardly ever have time simply to enjoy each other's company. Yogic stretching, relaxing and unwinding together may be all that is needed to make your womb, and his sperm, more "conception friendly".

Nature often works on a subliminal level, and an openness and emotional intimacy with each other can increase the likelihood of conception. Remember too, that prolonged stress can adversely affect the reproductive systems of both sexes, and that

10 Moving energy into your reproductive system

Every single message passing along your nervous system between the brain and the body has to go through the neck. It is hardly surprising that the neck and shoulders often get tense and energy-congested. Massage releases this congestion and allows energy to move freely around the body once again.

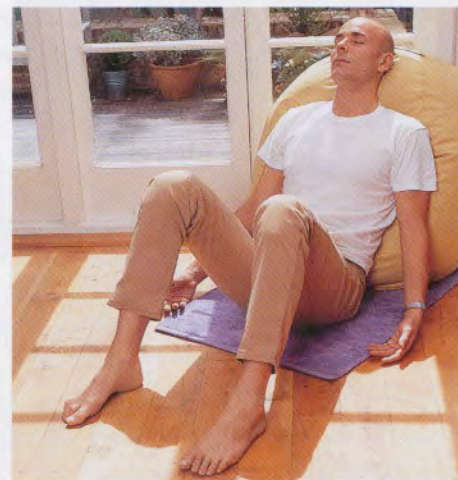


△ Encourage your partner to massage your neck and shoulders to restore energy flow while you place your hands on your abdomen and focus on "charging" your ovaries with deep breathing. Then change places so that you can massage his neck and shoulders.

yoga gradually dissolves the effects of past stress and also helps to prevent new stress from building up.

Couples are very often disappointed if conception does not occur exactly when they are ready for it, especially as preparing for a baby involves great shifts in outlook and investments of energy. Yoga helps to deepen harmony and acceptance between hopeful parents at this difficult stage.

▷ Teach your partner the joys of yoga relaxation. Stress affects his reproductive capabilities too.

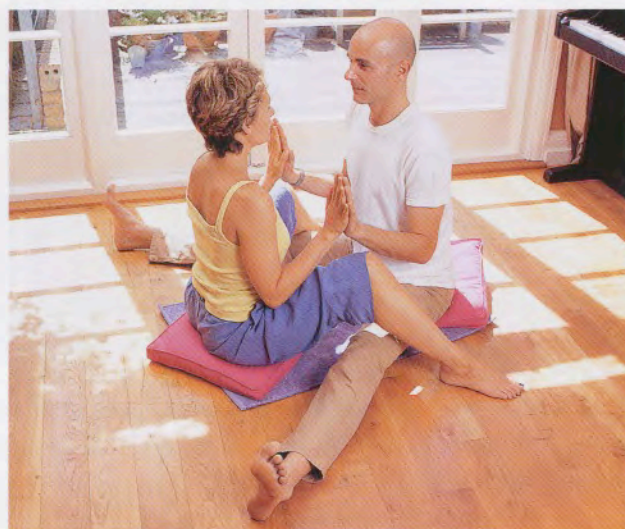


11 Synchronizing your energies

When both partners are relaxed, synchronized and emotionally ready for conception – "two hearts beating as one" – a favourable energy field will help conception to take place.



◁ 1 Sit back to back so that the flow of energy in your spines can synchronize, bringing you closer together on an energy level. You will find that your breathing also synchronizes as you relax into each other and become much more intimate.



◁ 2 To become even closer, sit facing each other with spines straight. Place your legs over your partner's legs, snuggle up, place your palms against his and gaze into each other's eyes. Your energies will synchronize and pass from one to the other through your eyes and your joined palms.

A sample practice for promoting conception

1

▷ Tuning in to your breath (5)



2 △ Happy womb pose (9)

3

◁ Deepening the breath (1)



4

◁ Stretch, bend and relax (2)

5

▷ Flexibility in the pelvis (6)



6

▷ Lengthening the outbreath (3)



Questions and answers

• **Roughly how long should we try to conceive before consulting medical experts?**

If you have been taking oral contraceptives for years and then stop in order to conceive, your reproductive system may take up to a year to re-establish its natural rhythm. If you and your partner have stressful jobs you may need to take steps to change your lifestyles so that you can both reduce your stress levels. Yoga practice speeds up the rate at which you de-stress. Medical intervention may ultimately be needed but remember that medical procedures are in themselves stressful – so do what you can to help yourselves first. Remember also that there is no definite answer – everyone is different.

• **We have had all the medical tests recommended to us and there is nothing wrong with either of us. What can we do now?**

If both of you have undergone tests that have revealed nothing, there may be simple reasons why you have not conceived yet. The most common reason is simply that it can take a long time – always far too long when you are waiting eagerly. Highly subtle psychological and physiological changes can make a difference here. For example, the slight shifts in pH levels – in both you and your partner – that can arise from continued yoga and relaxation practices, could help to lead you further down the road to conception.

• **What are the chances of success with IVF procedures?**

Only medical experts can advise you in your particular case. IVF procedures are increasingly successful.

• **I just can't relax. What am I doing wrong?**

Getting uptight about relaxing in order to conceive! It is better to learn to relax in order to reduce the stress in your life. This then creates an atmosphere where conception becomes more likely. Go on holiday with your partner and practise yoga together away from your daily routine. Make plans to simplify your lives when you get home so that you can enjoy more quality time together. Make yoga part of your life and use your positive affirmations each day. Most importantly, affirm your blessings with regard to what you already have in life.

• **I have a specific medical problem (such as having just one ovary) that makes conception difficult.**

A positive attitude is a great help in overcoming all kinds of obstacles, but we also have to cultivate an open, accepting disposition that will enable us to embrace our life equally well if conception remains elusive. Seek expert medical help and keep as healthy and relaxed as possible. Use regular yogic exercise, breathing, relaxation and meditation practices to keep all the systems of your body running as smoothly as possible.