

AN E-BOOK FROM
TRINE HEDEGAARD


YOGA

FOR TWO

*GETTING IN TOP PHYSICAL
AND MENTAL HEALTH
DURING PREGNANCY*

A SHORT INTRODUCTION





*Listen inwardly.
Tune in to your breathing,
your body and your
baby inside you.*

Dear reader,

I'm sure you recognise this feeling: being pregnant can give rise to mixed emotions. You experience the joy of feeling a new life growing inside of your womb, the sweet expectations, the body undergoing a lot of changes and needing more attention, and the anxiety you might sense when thinking about giving birth.

It was like that for me. My interest in Pregnancy Yoga began when I was expecting my first child. I was happy to be pregnant, but insecure about giving birth – and right in midst of these mixed emotions, I found both calmness and strength in the yoga I had been practising for years. At that time, yoga was not as popular as it is today – and certainly not Pregnancy Yoga. This meant that I ended up creating my own little Pregnancy Yoga routine consisting of gentle stretches, deep breathing and contact with my unborn child.

The effect was clear. Both during my pregnancy – and not least during child birth.

However, most surprisingly, I noticed how differently I experienced the contractions when I managed to integrate the simple but effective yoga tools: to keep my focus, to breathe deeply and guide the contraction through my body by moving my body – as opposed to when I lost focus and the connection to my breathing, causing me to be overwhelmed by the contraction.

This is all six years ago now. Since then I have become a certified yoga teacher and have attended trainings conducted by internationally renowned teachers specialising in Yoga for Fertility, Pregnancy Yoga, Yoga for Birth, and Postnatal Yoga for Mum & Baby.

With this e-book, which is a gift from me to you, I'm inviting you to concentrate on yourself and to listen to your body during your pregnancy. I also hope that you can use the exercises to make a genuine connection with the baby in your womb and become more intimate with your feminine side.

Take it easy and start at your own pace. Take the breaks you need, listen to your body and do not stress it. If in doubt, ask your physician or your midwife.

Yoga is very much about listening inwardly – tuning in to your breathing, your body and your baby inside you. Yoga is not supposed to hurt, it is meant to feel good! Have a nice time and enjoy these moments!

With love, Trine

why pregnancy yoga?

An Indian research project team studied the effects of yoga during pregnancy. A group of pregnant women did yoga one hour daily while the pregnant women in the control group did two walks of 30 minutes each day.

The result was clear: the pregnant women who practiced yoga gave birth to babies with a higher birth weight, had fewer premature babies and had lower risk of high blood pressure caused by the pregnancy.

Pregnancy Yoga *a mental and physical* *preparation before* *giving birth*

When the pregnancy test turns out positive, it can be tempting to reward yourself with nine months on the couch with the remote control in the one hand and a tea cup in the other. But, even though you must make sure to relax and take the breaks you need while your belly grows, this is also a time where you can be in your best shape!

To achieve this, Pregnancy Yoga is a fabulous tool.

With this e-book close at hand, you can learn to use some of the simple yet effective tools of yoga to become mentally and physically prepared for giving birth to your child. I will not fool you into believing that this is the way to a painless birth. But if you practice regularly, it will certainly help you along.

If you practice on your yoga mat a couple of times a week (or even better more), while making sure to coordinate breathing and exercises, this will slowly become a part of your body memory which will help you before, during and after giving birth.

Briefly put: the exercises in this e-book will...

- Strengthen your pregnant body in a safe way
- Prepare your body and your mind for giving birth
- Offer you a calm time of yoga where you can turn your attention towards your unborn child

The last point is perhaps the most important reason to do yoga during pregnancy. Yoga can create breathing room for you and your child, creating a quiet time for just being together.

Most people with a hectic life seldom remember to take time to stop and honour the miracle which unfolds during these important nine months. Give yourself and your child the gift of doing just this. It is my clear conviction that while your child is growing inside your womb you can establish a strong connection. Therefore, I will invite you to let your weekly – or perhaps daily – yoga time be a time when you give yourself room to enjoy and experience your pregnancy.

If you think this sounds a little too ‘new-age’, then concentrate on the physical exercises at first. These will without a doubt help you through the huge effort it takes to give birth.

All exercises in this e-book are, of course, tailor-made for your pregnant condition.

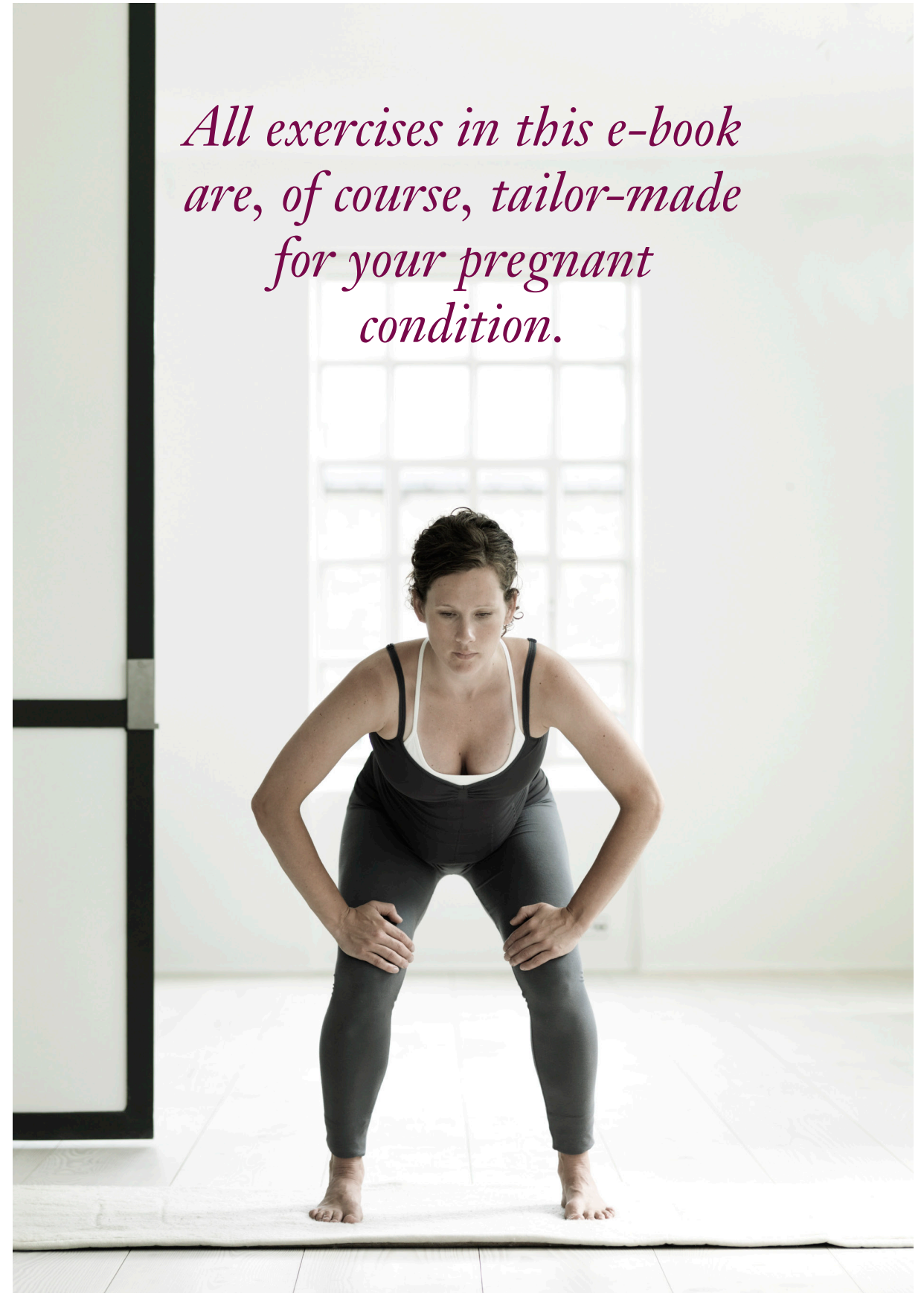
Before you start:

If you are a yoga beginner, I recommend that you wait until you are in the second trimester to begin this practice. If you have experience with yoga before you became pregnant, you can start whenever you like.

It is important that you take it nice and easy when you begin. Listen to your body and take the breaks you need, remembering it is never too late to begin a practice. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can continue this practice right up to giving birth. If you are unsure whether the exercises are suited for you and your baby, ask your doctor or midwife before you begin.

All you need to start is a yoga mat or some non-slip surface, a couple of cushions and maybe a blanket for the time of relaxation after practice. I will recommend you sit on a pillow or a folded blanket, so that your spine and, especially, your lower back gets the extra support it needs. If you cannot sit comfortably in an easy meditation posture, or if your knees are higher than your hips, you can use a few cushions to support your knees. If you have pelvic instability or pelvic pain, you may kneel on a cushion or stretch your legs out in front of you.

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DEEP BREATHING

Deep breathing has a relaxing effect and is like a soothing balm for the nervous and endocrine system. This goes for both you and your baby. When you breathe from deep down in your belly, more oxygen will reach your baby and, at the same time, you will feel greater awareness. Deep breathing is also an invaluable tool during the birth:

1. Make yourself comfortable on a cushion with your legs crossed in Easy Pose or with your legs stretched out in front of you
2. Create plenty of space for breathing and for your child by stretching your spine upwards, creating a straight posture
3. Open your chest by gently circling your shoulders back
4. Close your eyes and focus your attention on your breathing. To begin, don't change it; just observe your breath and what it feels like to breathe right now. Breathe in and out through your nose
5. Lay your hands on your belly in contact with your baby. Very gently, and at your own pace, start to expand your breathing, until you notice that your belly extends slightly out to the palms of your hands as you inhale, and withdraws slightly as you exhale
6. Breathe in this way for about two-three minutes
- and preferably longer if you have the time

LATERAL STRETCH

This exercise opens the sides of your upper body and gives a nice sense of having more space between your ribs - extra space for you and your baby to breathe.

1. Start by tucking your lower legs up under you with your buttocks resting on your heels with a cushion in between if you prefer. Separate your knees slightly. Alternatively, you can remain sitting in easy pose if your legs or feet are feeling too much of a strain
2. Rest your left hand down on the mat beside you and as you inhale, stretch your right arm upwards over your head. Lower as you exhale, and with your next breath, stretch your left arm up in a lateral stretch. Lower as you exhale
3. As you inhale, notice how your shoulders and chest open up towards the ceiling. As you stretch all the way out to the side, extend the right side of your body, creating more room between your ribs, room for you and your baby to breathe in
4. Repeat the exercise three to five times to each side at your own breathing pace. Return to centre when you are ready
5. Close your eyes and inhale softly down into your belly again, ...and exhale.





DIAGONAL BACK STRETCH

This exercise strengthens your back and at the same time gives your spine and lower back a little rest from the weight of your pregnant belly. Note: Modify with stretching your arms forward one at a time if you have pelvic pain or pelvic instability.

1. Stand on all fours. Place your palms directly beneath your shoulders, while your knees are aligned under the hips
2. keep your back relatively straight to protect your lower spine
3. Stretch your left arm forward and your right leg back in a straight line parallel to the floor as you inhale. Palm turned inward; foot flexed. Sink back as you exhale. As you inhale, lift the opposite arm forward and stretch your leg straight out behind, keeping your hips level. Sink back onto all fours as you exhale
4. Continue to the rhythm of your breathing. If you find it difficult to keep balance, you can keep the arms on the floor and just stretch the legs backwards one at a time
5. Feel the stretch from the tips of your fingers, diagonally across your back, down through your leg, out through your heel.
6. Continue at your own speed three to five times to each side and finish on all fours.

STRENGTHENING SQUATS

Squats are a wonderful exercise for preparing to give birth; in this position, your pelvis is at its most open, approximately an extra 2.5 cm in diameter. Apart from strengthening your muscles and boosting the circulation in your legs, squats also help the flexibility of your hips; your lower back gets a stretch, and your pelvic floor gets a gentle stretch too. If you don't have problems with your pelvis, it's a good idea to squat every day.

However, avoid this exercise if you have pelvic pain or pelvic instability! If your child has not turned, and is still lying with its legs downwards after the 35th week, only squat half way down, or avoid this exercise.

1. Get up to a standing position with your feet hips width apart, toes pointing straight ahead or feet slightly spread out to the sides. Bend your knees slightly to protect your lower back. Lift your arms up over your head as you inhale; look up at your palms as they meet
2. relax your shoulders and as you exhale, pull your hands down in front of your chest, and get down to a half-squat. Make sure that the bottom is higher up than the knees and that the heels do not lift from the mat
3. Place your hands over your knees with the fingertips pointing towards each other
4. Now, relax your neck and move your head down between your knees. Squeeze to engage your pelvic floor before you curve your back slowly upwards as you inhale. Find your own pace, exhale when you need to and bring your head up last
5. Keep breathing and continue at your own pace up to ten times. It's important always to listen to your body and to your baby. If you need to take a break, just take a break
6. Finish in the standing position with your palms gathered in front of your chest (picture 2). Take a couple of deep breaths down into your belly and relax. Shake out your legs, arms and shoulders and loosen up your body



Contractions and the pauses in-between

Contractions are the body's own intelligent tool for helping your child into this world. Specifically, we are talking about the physical contractions of muscles in the uterus opening up for giving birth and for pressing out the baby. The more you can work to support these contractions, the better and more easily they can do their part of the work.

You can practice with this simple endurance exercise.

If you are a first-time mother it can be hard, almost impossible, to imagine how a contraction feels. If this is not your first child, you might have a more or less vague memory about it. No matter whether you have given birth before or not, you have probably heard about contractions. Maybe you have heard that they are extremely painful. Maybe you have heard that they are not that bad. Maybe you have even heard that they can give a sense of pleasure. One thing is certain: contractions are experienced totally differently from woman to woman and from birth to birth.

It is my clear experience that you can prepare for contractions, and prepare quite well! With the contraction-simulation exercise outlined in the following paragraphs, you are well on the way.

Naturally, we cannot imitate how a real contraction feels, but this simulation exercise will give you a sense of how you can let the intensity brought by the contraction pass through your body by help of breath and focus.

In short, it is a three-minute endurance exercise, which strengthens your mental focus, the contact with your breath and your physical stamina.

If you practice regularly, you will be well-prepared for experiencing the real contractions when they come. Your body and your mind will remember how you – when you keep focus within yourself, breathe through the pain and relax your body – can cooperate with the contractions in a completely different and more constructive manner. And yes, it is easier said than done, but if you can surrender yourself to the body's built-in intelligence and welcome the contractions, they will feel less painful.

All it takes is a little practice:

- Practice in bringing focus out of the head and down in to the body.
- Practice in giving-in and relaxing while you keep focus and breathe through the contractions.
- Practice in holding and allowing the power that the contractions bring, also when it starts burning and gives an intense feeling in the body.

Before we start, it is important to stress that real contractions do not last three minutes. Don't worry! The exercise lasts three minutes only because it brings out a certain sense of intensity in the body and will increase your endurance.

Between the contractions you will experience breaks, and the absolute best way to prepare your body and your baby for the next contraction is to relax and return to the deep and relaxed way of breathing which will enable you to refill your body with new oxygen and energy to your baby's and your own cells.

Birth contractions are physical contractions of the muscles of the uterus, which are meant to shorten the uterus throat, open the uterus mouth and to push the baby further and further down through the pelvis and out through the vagina – a trip of about ten centimeters. The length and intensity of the contractions increase in the course of giving birth.

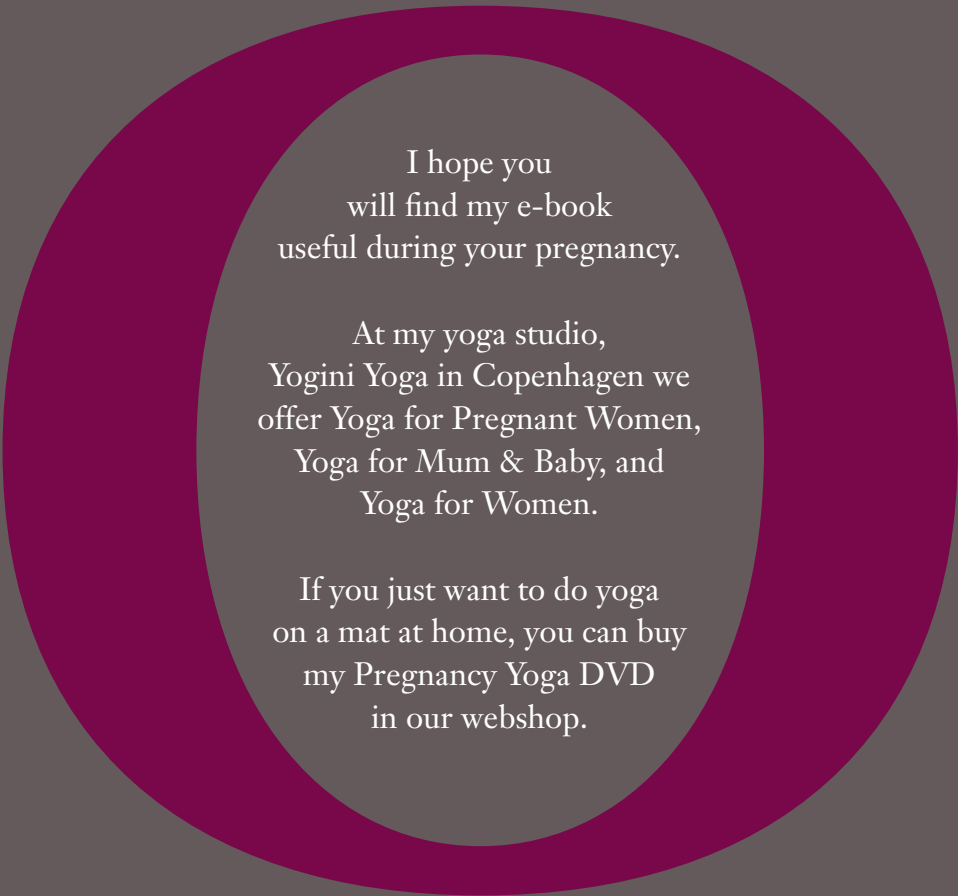
PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CONTRACTIONS WITH THIS CONTRACTION-SIMULATION-EXERCISE:

1. Make yourself comfortable on a pillow and set a timer for three minutes. Stretch your arms to each side until parallel with the floor. Let your palms face downwards and the fingers be apart. Relax your shoulders and close your eyes while you begin to move your arms up and down calmly like big wings.
2. Take a step deep inside yourself. Go into where you can breathe through everything, no matter what happens around you. Establish a strong contact to your breath. Whether you breathe through the nose both ways or through slightly parted lips is totally up to you. You can try both ways and see what feels best for you.
3. Keep your focus. Listen to your breath and let it guide you. Let it take you through the contraction with deep inhalations and exhalations.
4. You can take a break at any time and rest your hands on your knees, but keep focus within yourself with the eyes closed and the attention on your breath.
5. Relax and listen. Feel how you support the body and your baby on the way. Birth is a co-operation between you and your baby.
6. When the timer beeps after three minutes, come to ease with your arms stretched to each side. Take a deep inhalation through your nose and blow out through your mouth. Relax your arms and let the hands rest in your lap.
7. Relax while sitting with your eyes closed. Return to a relaxed feeling. Relax your arms, shoulders, jaw, the back, and the rest of the body. Keep focus inside yourself and turn your attention down towards your baby. Return to the slow deep breathing, in and out through the nose.
8. Open your eyes slowly and loosen your shoulders while moving them in circles.

END THE SESSION WITH A FINAL RELAXATION

End the day's session with a final relaxation lasting only about five to ten minutes. Relaxation is just as important as the yoga exercises, as this is when the benefits of the exercises are grounded within you, physically as well as mentally.

1. Make yourself comfortable while lying down or sitting, perhaps covering your body with a blanket.
2. Lie on your left side if you are more than 30 weeks pregnant or if you feel uncomfortable on your back. You can choose to place a pillow between your knees or under your right leg if you are resting on your side, or under your knees if you are on your back, so that you can relax fully in your lower back, the pelvis and the entire body.
3. Close your eyes and take a couple of deep inhalations through your nose and out through your mouth. Let go of your body and feel how it sinks a little deeper into the mat.



I hope you
will find my e-book
useful during your pregnancy.

At my yoga studio,
Yogini Yoga in Copenhagen we
offer Yoga for Pregnant Women,
Yoga for Mum & Baby, and
Yoga for Women.

If you just want to do yoga
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www.yoginiyogashop.com

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