

A pregnant woman with blonde hair is shown in profile, leaning forward in a yoga pose. She is wearing a light-colored, sleeveless top and dark leggings. Her hands are resting on her belly. She is wearing a necklace and a bracelet made of wooden beads. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting with sunlight. The word "pose" is written in the top left corner.

pose

Yoga Mama

First time mother and yoga instructor, **Cheryl Parsons**, delves into the hip world of **prenatal yoga** and explains how all that deep breathing translates on delivery day

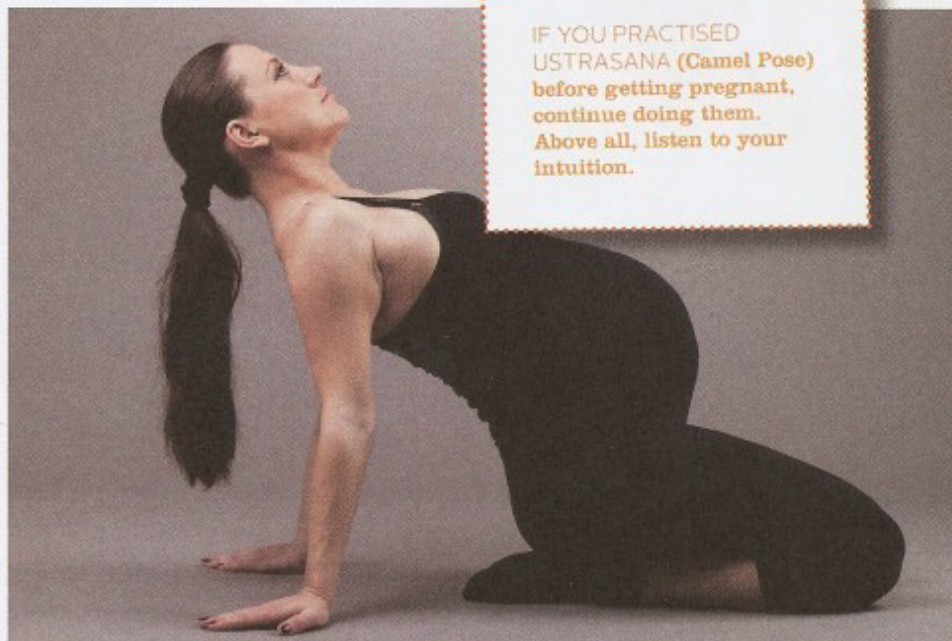
I did yoga breathing, I didn't scream and it was really zen. The labour was more like a meditation," actress Jessica Alba told US Weekly after the birth of her daughter, Honor. Leggy, Brazilian supermodel, Giselle Bündchen had a similar experience with her firstborn, Benjamin: "I did a lot of yoga and meditation in preparation and managed to have a very tranquil home birth in water. It didn't hurt in the slightest."

Ah yes, beautiful, yoga-loving A-listers and their perfectly shaped baby bumps! We have all seen the pictures; not a bead of sweat, a swollen foot or excess fat roll in sight. But, while celebrities from January Jones to Miranda Kerr are waxing lyrical about the benefits of prenatal yoga, how does it translate outside of Tinseltown? Is it really the ticket to birthing bliss?

"I am always happy if someone comes into the hospital in labour from a yoga class. It means that right up until the very end they can practice it," says Dr. Rajalakshmi, Obstetrics and Gynecology Physician at the American Hospital in Dubai. "I highly encourage it. Yoga helps a normal, pelvic delivery by stretching and strengthening all the ligaments and joints needed for labour during pregnancy. It opens the pelvis, stretches the back and encourages deeper breathing, which are all excellent tools for labour."

For some women, the joy of becoming pregnant can rapidly become overshadowed by a plethora of physical aches and pains, from morning sickness to chronic back ache and puffy ankles. While it may be tempting to sink back into the sofa with a tub of Pringles, exercise is often the key to feeling better. And prenatal yoga is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your body and your baby, and is something that be continued right up to 'D' day and beyond.

"Yoga boosts circulation and can help or eliminate fluid retention. It can improve your posture and strengthen the core muscles required during pregnancy and labour," says Elizabeth Bain, midwife, certified



IF YOU PRACTISED USTRASANA (Camel Pose) before getting pregnant, continue doing them. Above all, listen to your intuition.

doula (birthing assistant) and hypnobirthing practitioner. "Yoga also helps expectant mums to understand where their uterine muscles are and how to relax them during labour."

Dubai Yoga teacher and doula, Alexandra Horobin, says: "I had a very positive experience and gave birth without any intervention which was important for me. Years of yoga practice and training allowed me to release any fears I had. I trusted myself and felt very relaxed."

So what should you be doing when you roll out your yoga mat? Love them or hate them, squats form a big part of a prenatal yoga class. More than just making your thighs burn, hip opening poses such as Goddess and Malasana can create 30% more room in the pelvis and help to stretch the perineum in preparation for delivery.

"Working to strengthen the lower limbs significantly improves a woman's ability to birth in ideal positions such as standing or squatting," explains Alexandra. "These work with gravity rather than against it and generally facilitate a smoother pelvic birth whilst maintaining steady blood flow between mother and baby."

Prenatal yoga increases flexibility in the body and helps to bring a baby into an optimum position: head down and back to your belly.

Psychologically, a dedicated yoga practice requires trust in the body, commitment and being present in the moment – factors which are crucial to the beautiful art of childbirth.

"We place a strong emphasis on releasing fear and emotional tension," says Alexandra, who teaches prenatal yoga at Zen Yoga. "By fostering inner confidence and a positive mental approach to birth, yoga provides invaluable support."

"Birth is a sacred act and yoga reminds us that we must connect and be one during this important and exciting time," says Elizabeth. "Many of the mums I have witnessed using yoga and meditation during birth seem to have clarity in both mind and body. I believe it is important for women to reconnect with their bodies and to believe that their bodies were made for birth."

Breathing is vital to counteract our natural 'fight or flight' instinct during labour. Yoga encourages us to relax and resist the urge to tense up and helps immensely in facilitating a natural, more pain free delivery. Furthermore, complications sometimes arise and yoga arms women with the mental strength to deal with them. *

Cheryl Parsons teaches at Zen Yoga. Go to www.yoga.ae