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## Relevance of yoga and ayurvedic dietary regimen during pregnancy

**Dr. Aparna Singh and Dr. Sagar Sharma**

### Abstract

Pregnancy is without a doubt one of the most incredible life experiences for a woman. Ayurveda the traditional system of medicine suggests specific dietary regimen and healthy lifestyle for expecting mother for healthy development of fetus. *Yoga* is an extraordinary spiritual science of self-development and self-realization that shows us how to develop our full potential in our many sided live physical, vital, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. *Yoga* serves as an important entity in the reduction of negative symptoms associated with pregnancy and birth. This paper was aimed to summaries and analyzes specific dietary regimen by various ayurvedic scholars as well as practice of specific *asanas* for development of healthy fetus.

**Keywords:** Pregnancy, yoga, Ayurvedic dietary regimen

### Introduction

*Yoga* is an extraordinary spiritual science of self-development and self-realization that shows us how to develop our full potential in our many sided live physical, vital, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual. The many methods of *yoga* span of vast range from physical postures to breathing practice, mantra and meditation, all based upon a philosophy of consciousness and natural way of life. *Yogasana* often been thought of as form of exercise are really techniques which play in keeping the physical body in position and in cultivating awareness, relaxation concentration and meditation. The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit term “yug” and directly translates to as “to unite”; that means to work towards a unified experience of the self and improved health. Most recognized for its potential to create balance along emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions, *yoga* is a comprehensive system that uses physical postures (*asana*), breathing exercises (*pranayama*), concentration and meditation (*dharana* and *dhyana*), and contemplative practice.<sup>1</sup>

Pregnancy is without a doubt one of the most incredible life experiences for a woman. Pregnancy is a period in a lady life when she faces so many kinds of changes. Pregnancy week by week symptoms are very different from each other and they are found to be exciting for some and bothering for some. It is an amazing time when she will experience both physical and emotional changes unexpected and surprising.

The period of pregnancy is associated with maternal stress and host of negative consequences which might affect the fetal development. The fetal exposure to maternal stress and stress-related peptides is a risk factor for adverse outcomes on the programming of the nervous system and brain morphology of fetuses, infants and children. Hence it is important to reduce stress and provide quality of life to expecting mother for healthy development of fetus.

*Yoga* serves as an important entity in the reduction of negative symptoms associated with pregnancy and birth. The studies suggest that approximately 35% of women aged 28-33 years already practice *yoga*, it is important to evaluate its effects on the maternal experience of stress, anxiety, pain, discomfort, and other variables as well as on labor and birth outcome<sup>[2]</sup>.

### Discussion

Pregnancy is a stage in which women carries fetus for nine months in her womb. The proper growth of fetus entirely depends on the food and activities done by the carrying mother. Hence a healthy diet schedule as well as practice of regular *asana* and *pranayam* may help women to

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undergo normal labor and give birth to healthy baby. Ayurveda the traditional system of medicine suggests specific dietary regimen and healthy lifestyle for expecting mother for healthy development of fetus. The food article taken by pregnant women should be delicious and more in liquid or semi liquid form, moist, nourishing, enriching all the taste and supplemented with known digestive promoting herbal medicines and spices which are known to increase appetite and digestive power.

In ayurvedic literature monthly dietary regimen were described for gradual and proper development of fetus. Charaka states that during first month, if pregnancy is suspected then one should take milk in adequate quantity regularly. The milk need not to be boiled and should be taken when it is cold. During second month milk medicated with *madhur* (sweet) drugs should be taken. In third month milk mixed with honey and ghee should be administered. Sushruta emphasizes that diet rich in sweets, cold and liquid diet should be administered during first three month. He also recommends food made of swastika rice with milk to be given to her especially in the third month of gestation. During fourth month butter extracted with milk, rice with curd, pleasant food mixed with milk and butter should be given. In fifth month *ghrita* prepared with butter extracted from milk, the rice cooked with milk, meat of wild animals should be given. In sixth month *ghrita* medicated with the drugs of *madhura* group and *ghrita* or rice gruel medicated with *Gokshura* should be given. In seventh month the same dietary regimen as of sixth month should be followed. In eight month rice gruel preparation with milk and mixed with *ghrita* should be given. Sushruta advocates that for clearing the retained feces, *asthapana basti* (evacuative enema) should be given with herbal decoction followed with *anuvasana basti* (uncting enema) of oil medicated with milk and decoction of drugs of *madhur* group. This enables the lady to deliver without difficulty and remain free from complication. Acharya Charaka indicate *anuvasana basti* (uncting enema) with oil prepared with the drugs of *madhura* (sweet) group in ninth month. Vaginal tampon of oil given serves as lubrication of uterus, vaginal canal and perineum. The body of women thus treated becomes unctuous, gains strength and delivers a normal and healthy baby without complications<sup>[3,4]</sup>.

Yoga can be of great help to the expectant mothers during the pregnancy, at childbirth time and in post-delivery stages. The simple yoga poses help to make the body more flexible, improve posture, and ease many pregnancy problems. It prepares both body and mind for new situations and changes that occur during and after pregnancy. Yoga and breathing meditation techniques help to stay fit, healthy and happy during pregnancy and prepare body for labor. It can reduce anxiety and unwanted worries. Yoga also helps after pregnancy; it strengthens abdominal muscles and pelvic floor and helps to get back to pre-pregnancy shape faster. *Yoga* practicing includes physical postures and breathing techniques which minimizes the complication of pregnancy, like pregnancy induced hypertension, intrauterine growth retardation and pre-term delivery etc. An approach to *yoga* in pregnancy can improve birth weight; decrease pre-term labor, decreased IUGR with least or no complications. It relieves edema and cramping which is quite common in last months of pregnancy.

Yoga helps to reduce morning sickness, mood swings, and nausea. It also helps to decrease fatigue and tenderness, and also the swelling of breasts. It also helps to decrease fatigue and tenderness, and also the swelling of breasts. It raises the

energy level and helps in slowing the metabolism, thus restore calm and focus. Yoga also helps in reducing inflammation and swelling around joints. It strengthens and massages the abdomen and improves the digestive system. Yoga helps to restore the uterus, abdomen and the pelvic floor after childbirth. It also helps to relieve upper back tension and breast discomfort after pregnancy. Yoga helps to regain the fit and shapely body after pregnancy<sup>[5]</sup>.

**Regimen for yoga during pregnancy:** The regimens for yoga were divided into 3 categories broadly according to trimester:

**First trimester *Asanas*:**-The *Yoga Asanas* advice during the first trimester with slight modification such as avoidance of inversion, closed twist and back bends that might compress the uterus and cause low blood circulation to uterus followed with a long relaxation phase after each *asanas* were advised. The *Yoga Asanas* like *Virabhadrasana*, *Vrikshanam* was advised.

**Second trimester *Asanas*:** The *Asanas* practiced on lying back were avoided as it reduces the blood circulation to uterus. The center of gravity starts shifting to right so all standing poses with heel against wall for support were advised. The *asanas* advised was *Vajrasana*, *Bhadrasana*, *Katichakrasana*.

**Third trimester *Asanas*:** The *asanas* which do not exert pressure on abdomen wall were advised. Supine poses were avoided. Yogic *asanas* like *Ardha titali asana*, *Poorna titali asana*, *Chakki chalan asan*, *Uttanasan* was advised.

Some previous research work indicates significant effect of Yoga on fetal development. The studies done by Kathryn C *et al.* suggest that yoga is well indicated for pregnant women and leads to improvement on a variety of pregnancy, labour and birth outcome<sup>[6]</sup>.

Khalajzadeh M *et al.* study was done to study the effect of yoga on anxiety among pregnant women in second and third trimester. 24 healthy, non-athlete, and volunteer pregnant women in the second and third trimester of pregnancy were divided into experimental and control groups. They participated in a pretest-posttest randomized-groups design. The anxiety level was assessed by Pregnancy Outcome Questionnaire (POQ) in pregnancy. The experimental group performed the selected yoga exercises for 8 weeks. Data analysis using 2(group) \* 2(trimester) \* 2(test) ANOVA with repeated measures of test factor indicated the significant main effect of test and interaction of test and group ( $p < .001$ ). Other effects were not significant. In general, it can be concluded that yoga exercises regardless of trimesters of pregnancy has a positive impact on women's anxiety<sup>[7]</sup>.

The study done by Rakhshani A *et al.* showed the effect of yoga on utero-fetal placental circulation in high risk pregnancy. 59 high-risk pregnant women were randomized into yoga ( $n = 27$ ) and control ( $n = 32$ ) groups. The yoga group received standard care plus yoga sessions (1 hour/day, 3 times/week), from 12th to 28th week of gestation. The control group received standard care plus conventional antenatal exercises (walking). Measurements were assessed at 12th, 20th, and 28th weeks of gestation. RM-ANOVA showed significantly higher values in the yoga group (28th week) for biparietal diameter ( $P=0.001$ ), head circumference ( $P=0.002$ ), femur length ( $P=0.005$ ), and estimated fetal weight ( $P=0.019$ ). The resistance index in the right uterine artery ( $P=0.01$ ), umbilical artery ( $P=0.011$ ), and fetal middle cerebral artery ( $P=0.048$ ) showed significantly lower impedance in the yoga group. The results of this first randomized study of yoga in high-risk pregnancy suggest that

guided yogic practices and visualization can improve the intrauterine fetal growth and the utero-fetal-placental circulation [8].

### Conclusion

Pregnancy is without a doubt one of the most incredible life experiences for a woman. Pregnancy is a period in a lady life when she faces so many challenges. Hence Yoga serves an important entity for relieving stress in expecting mother. The simple yoga poses help to make the body more flexible, improve posture, and ease many pregnancy problems. It prepares both body and mind for new situations and changes that occur during and after pregnancy.

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