

Pregnancy a Mystical Expression



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Prenatal Development Stage a Mystical Expression.....	3
Prakruti/Constitution.....	5
The Three Vital Essences: Ojas, tejas, and prana.....	5
How to avoid miscarriage.....	6
General practices for well being during pregnancy.....	7
Abhyanga, self-love care.....	7
Meditation.....	7
Pranayama.....	8
Journaling.....	10
1st month Pregnancy.....	10
2nd month Pregnancy	11
3rd month Pregnancy.....	12
4th month Pregnancy.....	13
Image 1.....	13
Image 2.....	13
Image 3.....	14
Image 4.....	14
5th month Pregnancy.....	14
Image 5.....	15
6th month Pregnancy.....	15
Image 6.....	15
Image 7.....	16
Image 8.....	16
7th month Pregnancy.....	16
Image 9.....	17
Image 10.....	17
Image 11.....	18
Image 12.....	18
Image 13.....	18
8th month Pregnancy.....	19
Image 14.....	19
9th month Pregnancy.....	20
References.....	21
Source Images.....	22

“During pregnancy, as our bellies swell with life, we emulate Mother Shakti growing into plumpness, from the silver of her crescent moon into the roundness of her full moon”.

Maya Tiwari

Introduction

Traditional societies have typically regarded pregnancy as a sacred period in a woman’s life. Outstanding ceremonies are observed in the hindu tradition to celebrate the birth of a newborn soul. The mother is honoured and treated with rites, prayers, mantras, medicinal remedies during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care.

According to the Vedic traditional rites, the rite of conception and the key stages of pregnancy and birth, are observed and sacred ceremonies are performed by the couple with the guidance of elders and the family priest with the intention of inviting a divine soul into physical birth. ¹ As the carrier of new life, the pregnant woman embodies the miracle of creation in her very being. Pregnancy and birth are sacred moments in a women’s life.

Creating a new life brings about many changes, both physical and emotional. This essay is an attempt to accompany women in this symphony of creation from the time of conception with a practical Ayurvedic approach on how to embrace pregnancy by consciously honouring and assisting the miraculous journey of giving life to life.

Prenatal Development Stage a Mystical Expression

When does consciousness enter the fetus?

Consciousness enters the ovum at the same time of conception , the fertilized ovum is a conscious living tissue. At the time of conception the soul’s past karma imparts all aspects of that past karma into the jivatman (individual soul) which is a tiny expression in the ocean of consciousness. ²

The soul enters the embryo, along with the eightfold material for creation: mind, intellect, ego, and the five pure elements: space, air, fire, water and earth which serve as forces that protect the development of the embryo. Air supports the continuous segmentation process, fire the digestive process, water the embryonic fluid, earth supplies stability and strength and space the freedom necessary for development. ³ When the sperm and the ovum unite, subtle dynamic space of consciousness appears. That space is called non-akashic, which is consciousness, pulsating and throbbing without breath.

“In the fertilized ovum, jiva, the individual consciousness, is isolated from Brahma, the universal consciousness. Nādam (the soundless sound), bindu (pulsating consciousness), and kala (membranous structure) are all present in the zygote. It is not dead tissue growing in the womb”. ⁴

The vedic sages have described the physiological development of the fetus long before science explained chromosomes, they recognized that the human seed is more than than the DNA with the genetics of the parents, but that it contains within itself the traces of cosmic memory, its mystical replication into life revealing the entire universe. ⁵

Through the belly button the baby' and the mother's kundalini are united.

In the development stage the kundalini Shakti, which is electromagnetic energy, is active in the brain of the fetus creating a state of bliss, samadhi. The womb is a most blissful state of unconsciousness. The fetus is conscious only in a blissful way, not conscious of life but only conscious subjectively in a passive state. At the moment of delivery the kundalini descends to the root -muladhara- chakra separating individual consciousness from higher consciousness, and when the first breath is taken, objective consciousness begins, the baby has forgotten the state of bliss and passes to a physical state.

There is a respiratory centre in the hypothalamus and the first breath at birth activates it, in the womb the fetus is breathing without air through the mother's lungs. Ayurveda tries to explain this mystical expression in a spiritual way.

The brahmā randhra (anterior fontanel) and the shiva randhra (the posterior fontanel) are functioning under the control of prāna and as long as it is pulsating within the brain, the lungs don't need to open for air. The baby's digestion also happens through mother's digestion.

There is a memory centre too, but for the fetus it contains only memories of past lives, and it provide a bed for the new centre of memories to be formed, which will influence the nervous system (majja dhatu) ⁶.

Prakruti/Constitution

Prakruti is the fundamental principle of Āyurveda, it means nature or constitution, the Āyurvedic concept of prakruti, is the individual's genetic makeup expressed in terms of a unique combination of three fundamental principles or doshas: vāta, pitta and kapha in a person. Prakruti is creation which means that every human being is a unique creation of the universe. "The creation of the universe and the creation of a fetus are the same"⁷

At the time of conception according to the predominant doshas present in the sperm and the ovum, prakruti is determined and this genetic makeup of the fetus is unlikely to change in the course of one's lifetime. The ratio of vāta, pitta and kapha that create the prakruti of the fetus is influenced by the genetics, diet, lifestyle and emotions of the parents at the time of conception. "The constituents of the sperm and egg are: Ātman (the conscious principles, the soul); manas (mind), agni (the metabolic fire), Soma (bliss), the five elements, the 3 doshas (vāta, pitta and kapha), ojas, tejas and prana and twenty gunas" ⁸

An Ayurvedic lifestyle begins with determining our unique constitution or prakruti. It is especially important for the future mother because Ayurveda can show how to follow specific guidelines for harmonizing her prakruti ,enhancing the quality of life, raising consciousness to achieve good health for her and the growing baby and can teach her to choose proper nutrition bringing confident in the ability to give birth ⁹

The Three Vital Essences: Ojas, tejas, and prana

Ojas, tejas, and prana, the subtler, energetic forms or counterparts of the three fundamental ayurvedic principles or doshas (vāta, pitta and kapha) , maintain the development of immature dathu (tissue) into mature dathu.

Prana divides kalala (zygote), tejas maintains its integrity, and ojas maintains its immunity

Depleted ojas may manifest as chromosomal defects in the fetus and can cause congenital abnormalities . If the ojas of the baby is weak, the child may be born with a defect in the heart, a cleft palate, atrial septal defect, or ventricle septal defect.

During pregnancy, ojas is unstable as it moves between the mother and fetus and this is why it is especially important to develop it. ¹⁰

It is believed that healthy Ojas, brings about love and compassion in both mother and fetus. ¹¹

“Ojas, as a subtle material substance and essence of the tissues, requires the material support of a right diet ¹². Overuse of the motor organs can deplete ojas, particularly too much talking.

Ojas can be strengthened by:

- eating nourishing foods like: almonds, honey, saffron, ghee, whole grains, legumes, root vegetables, and dairy products.
- spendig time in nature
- good sleep
- limited electronic stimulation
- practicing meditation, breathing exercises (pranayama), chanting, yoga.
- taking rejuvenating herbs like: ashwagandha, shatavari and amalaki (under health practitioner’s supervision)
- Ghee can help to stabilize the Ojas in the fetus and to avoid chromosomal defects ¹³.

How to avoid miscarriage

“As we mislay our maternal memory and the Mother Consciousness of the world slackens, women appear to be literally losing the cervical grip and proper rhythmic dilation imperative to maintain the fetus in their wombs”¹⁴

Today one in six pregnancies end in miscarriage, due to physical and emotional factors.

Emotional stress, like fear of pain, of motherhood or of giving birth, maternal anger stored for generations or memory of sexual abuse, can cause endocrinological imbalances, long-term hormonal irregularities, and immune system disfunction, conditions that can lead to miscarriage.

Physical factors include, anomalies in the womb, narrow vaginal passage, apana vayu vitiation, and poor lifestyle choices like smoking or excess caffeine.

According to Wise Earth Ayurveda miscarriages are due to Pitta dosha vitiation and its fiery tendencies. Pitta aggravates Apana Vayu causing excessive pressure on the fetus. Therefore Pitta women are more likely to suffer from miscarriages, for them Ayurveda recommends a strong Pitta nourishing and restorative lifestyle to achieve mental and psychological balance : resting, avoiding conflict and exposure to sun, a Pitta pacifying diet, avoiding frozen, oily and spicy foods and meat ¹⁵.

General practices for well being during pregnancy

Abhyanga, self-love care.

One of the most essential self-care practices during pregnancy is the daily gently oil massage, because the body goes through tremendous changes to be able to accommodate the new life in the womb. It can be a useful practice to help to be in touch with the body and support its changes. The skin being the largest sense organ in the body with more sensory receptors than any other organ when massaged with oil, increases circulation throughout the whole body. This practice brings a deep sense of warmth and security, like the feeling of being loved.

Special attention should be given to the breasts and belly. Breast should be massaged from the periphery to the nipples to relieve any tenderness and to prepare for nursing.

To alleviate the itchiness and dryness resulted of the stretching skin, the belly should be massaged in a large clockwise direction, this could be an opportunity to connect with the soul of the growing baby in the womb.

“The communion to the great Goddess Mother enhances our ability to speak to our unborn child as we carry and sustain them within the inner sanctum of the womb for nine months¹⁶”

Ideally Abhyanga should be practice after awakening and before going to bed, with warm oil¹⁷.

Meditation

“Through absorption and concentration, the processes of meditation, we may go beyond sensory perceptions” Patanjali

Mediation allows: knowing, intuiting, and healing. It helps to achieve a pathway to intuition and inner freedom. The goal of meditation is to stay present with ones own self allowing the mind to become as tranquil as the surface of a lake in a windless day.

The mind goes beyond common perception of sights and sounds, thoughts, desires, imagination and enters the sanctuary of buddhi (intellect) ultimately to the realm of pure consciousness.

Concentrating on the sacred syllable Om is a direct means to meditation. OM is the sound seed from which the universe came to be and by which it is sustained¹⁸.

Pregnancy is a time during which many women feel naturally inclined to stillness and deep relaxation. Meditation can help to reduce stress, to ease physiological symptoms like morning sickness and high blood pressure and especially to deepen the connection with the fetus creating a sense of peace. Meditation can prepare the mother to give birth while she learns to consciously relax and work with the inner breath. It is best to practice after the asana or pranayama exercises.

Generally one begins a meditation session with a formal practice, employing techniques like prayer, mantra, pranayama. The future mother can concentrate on the sacred sound OM, her own breath where the inhalation meets the exhalation, or can use different points of focus or *bhavanas*, a Sanskrit word meaning intention, attitude or focus. Some examples are:

- The image of her healthy baby growing
- An object of nature
- A feeling of protection from the universe or divine forces

Meditation should be accompanied by a proper lifestyle, pure diet, impressions and associations without which it is not possible. An ayurvedic lifestyle provides the means¹⁹.

Pranayama

Pranayama from: prana meaning Vital Force and ayama, expansion. Pranayama is therefore “expansion of the vital force”, through this practice, one slows down and extends the breath so that the inner prana or higher life-force can manifest, calming the mind and promoting meditation.

It is the most important single action that can enhance our health. Pranayama invigorates not only the lungs but all internal organs through an internal massage created by the movement of the inhalation and exhalation. Pranayama helps to promote emotional stability reducing depression, grief and attachment. It treats all doshas, stabilizing Vata, reducing Kapha in head and lungs avoiding stagnation and the production of mucus; cooling pranayama reduces pitta²⁰.

It is specially important to practice Pranayama during pregnancy because it will be the most important tool during labor, helping through contractions, and allowing to deeply relax between contractions. In pregnancy is best to start slowly and gradually and to avoid forceful breathing or retentions of breath. The most beneficial pranayama exercises during this time are: ujjayi, shitali. and alternate nostril breathing²¹.

Please note: it is very important that pranayama is learned from a teacher and practice under strict vigilance to avoid side effects.

Ujjayi pranayama directions:

Ujjayi breathing has a healing effect, it reduces Kapha and Vata and ignites agni, raising prana in head, throat and heart. It should not be practice at the same time as alternate nostril breathing.

Sitting in a comfortable position, keeping the eyes closed. Inhale through the nose and exhale slowly through the mouth. Repeat a couple of times and then close the mouth. Keeping the mouth closed inhale and exhale through the nose and slowly direct the breath to the back of the throat²².

Shitali pranayama directions:

Shitali means cooling or soothing, it can help alleviate the morning sickness of the first trimester.

Sitting in a comfortable position, keeping the eyes closed and the shoulders relax, make the shape of an O with the mouth, curling the tongue or placing it behind the two front teeth. Inhale slowly lifting the chin gently, feeling cold air coming into the mouth. After inhaling close the mouth and exhale slowly through the nose and lower the chin back to the centre.

Repeat for twelve rounds²³.

Alternate nostril breathing directions:

It is the most important pranayama recommended in Ayurveda, because it helps to control the breath and to purify the channels as no other pranayama exercise. It balances the flow through the right and left nostril which relate to the pingala and ida channels on the left and right side of the body respectively providing the main energy to both sides and their organs in the body.

Pingala relates to male and solar energy and Ida to the female and lunar energy.

This practice requires blocking the nostrils alternately.

Spreading the palm of the right hand, turning down the index and middle finger, and extending the other two fingers and the thumb, place the thumb on the right side and the extended two fingers on the left side. Breathe through the left on the count of 4, then block both nostrils, retain the breath on the count of 16 and exhale through the right on the count of 8, then repeat inhaling through the alternate nostril (right)²⁴.

Journaling

Journaling is a powerful spiritual practice that frees the mind of unnecessary thoughts, it is a way to witness the spiritual progress as our rhythms attune with those of nature.

It can become a tool for the pregnant woman allowing her to contemplate how her life is changing bringing more awareness to the experience.

A simple way to begin the practice is setting a time limit for it, and not censoring grammar, punctuation or style, whatever comes to mind will be worth recording and exploring.

Some journaling exercise could include writing about²⁵:

- Dreams
- Fears around motherhood, giving birth, relationship with the partner
- Accepting the changing body as healthy
- The meaning of being a mother²⁶.

1st month Pregnancy

“ As the entire tree is present in its seed, so the whole person is present in the human seed” ²⁷

In the first month the embryo is a soft mass, kalala, meaning “the first expression of creation”, primordial expression of prakruti, the union of male and female.

From that kalala, the child’s seven dathus (tissues) are manifested. Within the first month, rasa reaches maturity²⁸. “By the end of the first month fetus is about 1 cm long and weights about 1 gm. rudiments of the eyes, ears and nose are visible, buds corresponding to the limbs are distinct, umbilical cord is short and thick”²⁹

Morning sickness is very common and healthy response in this first stage of pregnancy, normally lasting for the first trimester ; some scientists suggest that it is a protective mechanism for the fetus, and women who experience it are less inclined to miscarriages. From an Ayurvedic viewpoint it is due to an aggravation of Pitta dosha, which controls the levels of estrogen that

increase the acidic secretions in the stomach. The earth element is predominant during pregnancy, the sense of smell is related to this element and therefore pregnant women are more sensitive to smells.

To avoid morning sickness:

- the stomach should not be empty, eating frequent high-protein snacks or small meals throughout the day, and first thing after awakening.
- Drinking coconut water
- Eating the foods that are craved.
- Herbs that can help controlling morning sickness: ginger, shatavari (demulcent properties), peppermint.³⁰

Diet Recommendations

According to the Astanga Hrdayam the woman who has conceived should be nourished with more butter, ghee and milk.

Sushruta recommends soups with rice. “The most important foods noted by all authors are rice, milk, ghee and butter, foods should be nourishing, constitutionally correct and sattvic (pure)”³¹

2nd Month Pregnancy

During the second month from the kalala state (jelly mass) are produced the ghana (hard mass), peśī (muscle) and arbuda (anti-hill) to be burn as a male, female or eunuch (hermophrodite), respectively.³²

“The features (of the pregnant woman) during this month are feeling of emaciation, heaviness of the abdomen, fainting, vomiting, loss of taste (or appetite), more salivation, debility, appearance of lines (specially over the abdomen), desire of sour things, enlargement of the breasts and black colour of the nipples, heartburn and desires of different kinds”³³

At the end of second month embryo is 2.5 to 3 cm. long and it weights about 4 gm. fingers and toes begins to show, head portion is disproportionally large because of the development of the brain, external genitalia is formed but sex is not differentiated, face and external ear begin to appear.³⁴

In the second month, the five elements combine and express themselves in the form of the three doshas -Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, forming a ball-like shape if the embryo is a male and the shape of an egg if it's female³⁵

Rakta dathu reaches maturity.³⁶

Diet Recommendations

Warm milk mildly spiced, gently warmed and not combined with other foods to avoid vomiting, nausea or dehydration and to supply nourishment. Milk provides calcium and protein both essential during pregnancy. Vata types will benefit from whole milk, Pitta from 2% milk and Kapha from 1% or skim milk.

Herbs recommendations: Shatavari (to treat heartburn) and bala³⁷

3rd Month Pregnancy

“From the 3rd month of pregnancy the mother has two hearts:her own and the baby's, there is subtle communication between the mother's heart and the baby's heart”, that is why feelings of insecurity, fear and grief in the mother or a confused relationship with the father can affect the baby's heart.³⁸ It is say that all of the experiences of the mother filter down to the baby, therefore it is good to avoid exposing to images or sounds that are violent, like in movies or T.V. shows, reading or hearing upsetting stories and listening to music that create negative vibration.³⁹

Ayurveda says the heart is the seat of the mind, so manas prakruti is expressed from the third month of pregnancy because the heart is developing.⁴⁰

A definitive structure of the embryo is formed, along with some protrusions for the head and limbs, the eleven organs of the body are introduced and heart adopts all its functions.

Mamsa dathu reaches maturity.⁴¹

Fetus is about 8 cm long and weights from 30-45 gm., face, fingers and toes are well formed and start having nails, there is sex differentiation. Fetus can moved provoking gentle tap on the side of the abdomen of the mother.⁴²

Diet Recommendations

Milk mixed with honey and ghee (in different proportions)⁴³

4th Month Pregnancy

Fetus begins to have some desires that are reflected as cravings by the mother, these fetus's desires are largely patterned by mother's physical and psychic aspirations. Fulfilling these cravings helps to safeguard the health of fetus. ⁴⁴ Medas dathu reaches maturity.⁴⁵

Fetus is about 16 cm., weights about 100 gm., soft hair appears, umbilical cord exhibits twisting, and placenta is well formed.⁴⁶

Diet Recommendations

Milk with 12g of butter melted, Sushruta recommends soup prepared from meat. ⁴⁷

Yoga Asana Practice

During this month a prenatal yoga practice could be introduced to promote peace of mind, and to stabilize body, breath and mind. "Ultimately, through yogic discipline, we have to bring these wandering doshas back to their -homes- of vata in the pelvic cavity, pitta in the abdominal cavity, and kapha in the thoracic cavity. When we balance the doshas in situ, then everything from the conception of the child to pre-and post-natal care becomes easy."⁴⁸

Prenatal Yoga improve sleep, relieve back pain, alleviates symptoms like nausea, shortness of breath and hypertension. Postures for the opening of the pelvis, to enhance the mobility in hip and pelvic joints. Balancing poses to build strength in legs, increase circulation and stability.

Examples: Tadasana (Mountain Pose); Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose), expanded leg stretch (Prasarita Padottanasana), Parshva Konasana (side angle pose), Adho Mukha Shvanasana (downward facing dog pose), Janu Shirshasana (head to knee pose), Shavasana (corpse pose)⁴⁹

PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA (EXPANDED LEG STRETCH)

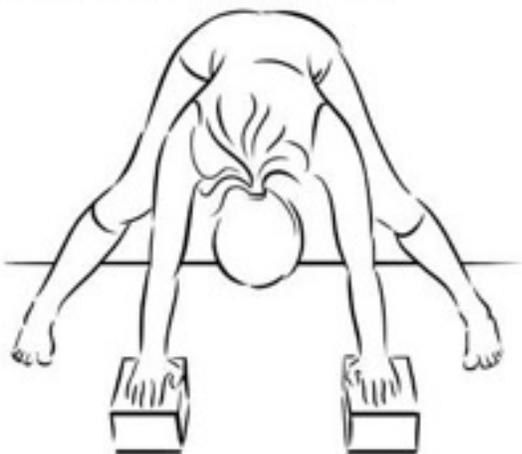


Image 1

SHAVASANA (CORPSE POSE)



Image 2



Janu Shirshasana (Head to Knee Pose)

Image 3



Parsvya Konasana (Side Angle Pose)

Image 4

5th Month Pregnancy

The structure of the brain takes form, the mind begins to register subtle impressions.⁵⁰

Ashti dathu reaches maturity.⁵¹

Fetus is about 25 cm., and weights about 300 gms., skin is covered with fatty material. Fetus movements are felt in the abdomen.⁵²

Diet recommendations

A teaspoon or two of ghee daily.⁵³

Yoga Asana Practice

In addition to the sequence of Month four, add the squatting pose.⁵⁴



Image 5

6th Month Pregnancy

“In the sixth month, the tendons, veins, hair, strength, colour, nails and skin become manifest”⁵⁵

The fetus begins to exhibit some emotions, a sensitive mother can read feelings like pain or pleasure coming from the fetus.⁵⁶ Majjā dathu reaches maturity.⁵⁷

Fetus is about 30 cm. long and weights about 680 gm., eyebrows and eyelashes appeared, and the movements of the fetus become visible.⁵⁸

Diet Recommendations

Ghee with demulcent herbs could be taken.

Yoga Asana Practice

Restorative asanas are most beneficial to allow the body to deeply rest and being in a receptive mood. Examples are: child pose (balasana), wide angle pose (upavishta konasana), reclining bound angle pose (supta baddha konasana) and shavasana.⁵⁹



Balasana (Child's Pose)

Image 6



Upavishta Konasana (Wide Angle Pose)

Image 7



Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

Image 8

7th Month Pregnancy

“ In the seventh month, the fetus is developed in all its parts, and nourished well. The doshas being pushed up by the fetus and getting localized in the heart (of the mother) produce itching, vidāha (burning sensation) and kikkisa (appearance of linear marks on abdomen, thighs and breasts ”⁶⁰

The physical structure of fetus is formed. Shukra dathu reaches maturity. ⁶¹

To alleviate conditions of the skin sandalwood paste could be applied on the chest and abdomen⁶².

Fetus is about 35 cm. and weights 1100 gms., eyes are open.⁶³

Diet Recommendations

Medicated ghee with sweet herbs like shatavari and bala. If there is burning indigestion oil and salt should be reduced.

Yoga Asana Practice

To help reduce the tension in back and neck caused by the weight of new breast tissue, the asana practice from this month on will help to open the chest area for a sense of openness and freedom. It will be helpful to concentrate on the prana entering in with the inhalation and expanding the intercostal muscles while opening the heart.

1. Tadasana
2. Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose)
3. Squatting pose
4. Trikonasana (Triangle pose)
5. Prasarita Padottanasana (expanded leg stretch)
6. Virasana with arm movements (hero pose)
7. Chakravakasana (ruddy goose pose)
8. Shavasana ⁶⁴



Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

Image 9



Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose)

Image 10



Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)

Image 11



Virasana with Arm Movements (Hero Pose)

Image 12



Cakravakasana (Ruddy Goose Pose)

Image 13

8th Month Pregnancy

Ojas begins to spread and promote stability in the entire body. ⁶⁵

Fetus is about 40 cm. and weights 1570 gms. ⁶⁶

Cleansing edemas are recommended at this time with little amount of oil in the decoction, followed by oil enemas prepared with sweet herbs, to prepare apana vayu for delivery. ⁶⁷

Diet Recommendations

Thin gruel prepared with milk and ghee.

Yoga Asana Practice

Balancing poses could be add because they help the mother-to-be to find the centre of gravity which changes in pregnancy, increase focus, concentration and centeredness essential qualities during labor. ⁶⁸

1. Tadasana
2. Vrikhasana (Tree pose)
3. Utthita Hasta Padangushthasana (extended side hand to big toe pose)



Utthita Hasta Padangushthasana (Extended Side Hand to Big Toe Pose)

9th Month Pregnancy

Fetus is about 45cm and weights approx. 2.5 Kg., digestive and circulatory system are well formed. ⁶⁹

Regular oil enemas with sweet herbs. Cotton cloths soaked with oil or ghee should be applied to the vagina for oleation to prepare delivery and to prevent tearing.⁷⁰

It is very common to experience digestive problems in this last stage of pregnancy because the size of the baby reduce the space for the intestines and other organs. Some normal complains are: heartburn, constipation, gas and indigestion. Recommendations are to eat smaller meals more often, avoiding Pitta aggravating foods (to prevent heartburn). It is advised to remain upright at least 2 hours after eating and to walk gently.

During this time it is important to rest and remain relaxed but at the same time staying strong and active⁷¹

Diet Recommendations

Food mixed with fat (ghee) and meat broth or thick gruel. Fat is very important at this stage.⁷²

Fresh foods that are creamy, soft, warm and sweet, like rice cereal cooked with milk, cardamom and ghee. Healthy fats to lubricate the deeper tissues.

Yoga Asana Practice

It is good to try to practice daily, following is a recommended sequence but the pregnant woman can integrate other poses learned in previous months.⁷³

1. Tadasana
2. Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose)
3. Squatting pose
4. Trikonasana (Triangle pose)
5. Chakravakasana (ruddy goose pose)
6. Adho Mukha Shvanasana (downward facing dog pose)
7. Balasana (child's pose)
8. Shavasana

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Source of images

Images 1-14 Margo Shapiro Bachman, *Yoga Mama, Yoga Baby, Ayurveda and Yoga for a healthy pregnancy and Birth* (Boulder, Colorado: Sounds True, 2013), p.104-155

