

# Yoga, visualisation and affirmation in YogaBirth



**Jill Benjoya Miller** describes the benefits of yoga during pregnancy

Yoga is a self-administered therapy, which is ideal during pregnancy when each woman needs to develop for herself the confidence and belief that she can make good choices, she can labour and give birth, and she can mother her child. Every antenatal yoga class I teach convinces me, yet again, that yoga is a very special path toward birth and motherhood.

Yoga practice is holistic, engaging body, mind and spirit to enhance health. The positions combine movement and breath with self-reflection: a moment to feel the inner workings and intelligence of the body, to sense one's intuition, to realise intentions.

Even the names and shapes of yoga postures evoke images that lend themselves to wonderful visualisations and affirmations for birth.

For example, the 'basic standing' that we do each week in YogaBirth classes – specialist yoga for pregnancy – is called Mountain Pose in English (yoga positions have original names in Sanskrit). Mountain Pose realigns the body and balances weight, thus reducing strain on the lumbar spine and pelvic joints and developing good postural awareness. But there is more. Visualise a mountain, embedded in the Earth yet rising to the clouds, noble,

beautiful, enduring. Standing in Mountain Pose, a pregnant woman can appreciate how truly magnificent and resilient her own body is as her child grows inside.

### Powerful...

Warrior positions are also full of imagery and good fun: she stands with legs strong and feet wide apart, heels sinking down as if they had roots extending deep into the ground to create a solid foundation; then her arms open out, with her spine beautifully long and her gaze uplifted. The rhythm of her breath is continuous, full and smooth. Her chest is unrestricted, free to expand fully with each breath, and to release tension. From the soles

We imagine various labour scenarios: early, irregular contractions, deep rhythmic active labour, spiky fast transition, beginning to push and finding where to direct energy, slowing down for gentle crowning

of her feet to her fingertips flows vital energy, awakening and nourishing her entire body. She visualises herself possessing determination and courage to meet challenges. Warrior positions are about being simultaneously powerful and open. When a pregnant woman is in Warrior, every fibre in her body says "I can". This is the opposite to fear.

### ...Yet soft

In YogaBirth, softening is just as important as strengthening. Many positions are about opening and creating space for the baby to journey toward birth. And in every position we think of 'grounding': feeling the natural force of gravity as it affects the body. Few people pay attention to gravity, until they start to feel it in their body through yoga and begin to appreciate it as a huge aid to the progress of labour. Sitting in Tailor Pose, with the soles of her feet together and her knees dropping to each side (supported, if necessary, and contraindicated with symphysis pubis dysfunction), she is relaxing the strong muscles of her bottom and thighs and increasing flexibility through the joints of her pelvis. She is feeling the downward pull of gravity through her pelvis and lower body, and thinking of being soft and open, releasing deep pelvic floor muscles, surrendering to strong forces moving through her. By contemplating these words as she breathes in this open posture, she creates an affirmation in her mind, and a memory in her body, to let go for birth.

Affirmations, words either silent or

Professional Association of Yoga & Childbirth Educators

Dedicated to women and families during the childbearing year

With 3 decades of experience, we offer

Yoga for pregnancy  
Birth Preparation Workshops  
Hypnobreathing for labour  
Postnatal Yoga

Teacher Training Courses  
Foundation Antenatal Module  
Starts September 2010

Postnatal Module  
Starts October 2010

For details and application forms please see our website  
[www.yogabirth.org](http://www.yogabirth.org)



Tailor position



Labour practice

spoken, can keep her moving forward in a good direction through labour. In YogaBirth we work with affirmations in the regular yoga postures, and also in short, weekly labour practices. Every week we try different gravity-enhancing, instinctive labour positions – standing and leaning onto something, on hands and knees, lunging, squatting, sitting on a ball – and we add natural swaying and rolling movements and flowing breath. We imagine various labour scenarios: early, irregular contractions, deep rhythmic active labour, spiky fast transition, beginning to push and finding where to direct energy, slowing down for gentle crowning. We visualise the small, soft baby's head, the spacious pelvis and the supple tissues of the vagina and perineum, able to easily expand. "Soft hands, soft lips, soft cervix... breathe in energy, breathe out pain... I am strong enough... I can do this...labour is normal!"

YogaBirth teachers often use a doll and pelvis while teaching yoga, to show the bones and joints of the pelvis, pelvic mobility and the baby's alignment when the mother is in different positions, and the way the baby

moves through the pelvis during labour. This helps women understand, in a practical way, how their everyday movements may affect the available space and the position of the baby in the pelvis, and also why they feel and move as they do during labour in order to relieve pain and assist the baby's descent and rotation.

#### Conclusion

Through yoga, a pregnant woman learns the language of her body and of birth. She visualises how her body works. As a result of feeling and understanding her physiology, she can develop trust and confidence in her own body and in the natural process of birth. Yoga, rich with imagery and affirmations, offers women plentiful resources for birth and parenting. Most

importantly, yoga draws awareness out of the busy mind and deep down, into the bones and tissues, to the place where birth happens. This is where we need to be. **TPM**

Jill Benjoya Miller is a YogaBirth and Active Birth Teacher, birth doula and mother of three. She lives and works in North London.

[www.yogabirth.org.uk](http://www.yogabirth.org.uk)