

# Hot Yoga for Hot Mamas

THE PROS & CONS OF PRE-NATAL YOGA.  
by Jennifer Snelling

I walked into my first Bikram yoga class feeling fairly confident. I'd been doing yoga for years and had continued to exercise normally through my first 18 weeks of pregnancy. Fortunately, I hadn't yet done much reading on the subject. Only after the class did I learn that the room is generally heated to 105 degrees and it is normal to feel nausea, dizziness, and disorientation during the poses.

After two poses, sweat began to bead up on my forehead. Even though the room was, thank god, only heated to between 98 and 100 degrees, I could hear my midwife saying, "Be careful. Pregnant women are more sensitive to heat." Yeah, no kidding. What had I gotten myself into?

"Hot yoga," as it is sometimes called, is a series of 26 *asanas* designed to warm and stretch muscles, ligaments and tendons by balancing, and creating pressure at the same time. During the poses, the blood supply to arteries and veins is cut off, creating pressure. When the pose is released the blood rushes through the veins and arteries, flushing them out — like a tourniquet release.

At nine-months pregnant, Lisa Starr swears that Bikram is what has kept her healthy and happy throughout her pregnancy. "Bikram has been the best thing I've done for my pregnancy. It keeps me fit, it keeps me sane and feeling good mentally, it keeps me in tune with my body through my breathwork, and it's helping loosen up my hips." That should prove helpful when Starr's baby arrives in early September.

I tried thinking of all these positives during the class I attended. But all I could concentrate on was the pain in my legs during triangle pose and the sweat running down my back and pooling at my waistband. I watched as sweat dripped off the arms of the woman in front of me and onto her mat. A girl in the front row was down. Before long, the girl beside me also decided to lie down for a minute.

Bikram yoga isn't for everyone. Obstetrician Dr. Jan Staffl says he wouldn't recommend Bikram yoga for pregnant women. "The concern is elevated body temperature, which is why we tell pregnant women not to sit in hot tubs that are more than 103 degrees," he says. Dr. Paul Qualter-Burcher, also an obstetrician, agrees. "Bikram is the only type of yoga that I would not recommend for pregnant women," he says. "The fluid fluctuation that comes with the excessive heat is not a good idea in pregnancy. Dehydration can cause contractions and other problems."

Of course, pregnant women need to be particularly careful during any form of exercise. Definitely check with your midwife or doctor before attending a class. Some instructors recommend using a thermometer if you're pregnant to make sure your body temperature doesn't rise too quickly. Most instructors suggest that if you have been practicing Bikram yoga just prior to your pregnancy, then you may continue with other forms of yoga through the third month and then begin Bikram with modified poses.

Bikram Yoga instructor Amy Hopkins points out the similarity between Bikram and labor. During the poses the body contracts, then returns to relaxation pose. It prepares pregnant women to handle pain and discomfort through breathing and helps them to relax more readily when the pain subsides. "It also helps with all the side effects of pregnancy," says Hopkins. "Varicose veins, digestive problems, and backaches."

Starr, who felt her baby move for the first time in class, is quick to point out the mental benefits as well. "Yoga keeps me relaxed. If I'm relaxed, then my baby is relaxed, too."

But, as with any type of yoga, some poses are not recommended for pregnant women. While the Bikram yoga class in Eugene is not a pregnancy class, the instructors are happy to provide alternate poses if they know you're pregnant. For instance, while the rest of the class was doing cobra pose, Starr arched into a partial bridge with rounded belly high in the air.

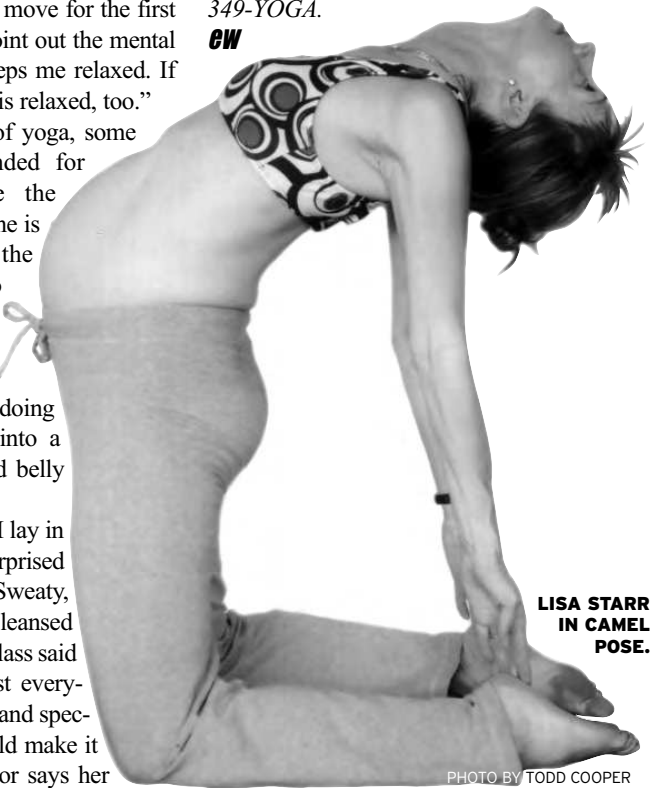
By the end of the class, I lay in relaxation pose and was surprised to realize that I felt good. Sweaty, but good. My body felt cleansed and peaceful. Outside, the class said a friendly goodbye. Almost everyone wished Lisa good luck and speculated on whether she would make it to the next class. Her doctor says her

baby is in position and ready to deliver.

It's true that any type of yoga is a lot like labor. Pregnancy is about taking care of ourselves and finding growth from within. Our bodies grow, but so do our expectations of what our bodies can do.

*Jennifer Snelling, expecting her first child, is a free-lance writer in Eugene. For more information on Bikram yoga classes, contact Darlene Muller or Amy Hopkins at 349-YOGA.*

EW



LISA STARR  
IN CAMEL  
POSE.

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

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