



BONDING WITH BABY

My life had been turned upside down since the birth of my son James 12 months ago. I have still found a place for yoga even in the most sleep deprived of moments. It has been my pacifier and soother bringing calmness to the body and mind. I have managed to find "me" again after the bump. For me yoga is my life and now James can enjoy that experience too.

Motherhood is a time of amazing metamorphosis. The journey into parenthood is a joyous and scary one. The "pregnancy brain" gives way to the "mother brain" of missed appointments, lost handbags, nappy neurosis, and wondering where your time has gone, and what is sleep?! The brain of an exhausted mum feels like it's wearing a jumper, sounds may be muffled, thoughts are vague.

Simple questions like, "would you like a roast vegetable sandwich?" cause such concentration while we try to remember what vegetables are and if we are hungry. You probably still feel that your body is not your own with aching shoulders and backs from weightlifting your new family member around 24/7. Coming to terms with this little person outside of you can be an emotional ride. Through yoga the new relationship between baby and mother can grow and blossom.

There are many benefits to be gained from practicing yoga together with your child:

FOR THE MOTHER:

- Helps improve posture.
- Increases overall endurance and stamina.
- Reduces back tension and discomfort.
- Builds core strength and flexibility.
- Reduces anxiety and stress.
- Can help you rediscover your centre of calmness.

FINDING TIME FOR YOURSELF CAN BE DIFFICULT AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF A NEW BABY.

SAMANTHA LEE EXPLORES WAYS TO REGAIN HARMONY WITH YOUR OWN BODY WHILST NURTURING THE BONDING PROCESS WITH YOUR NEW BUNDLE OF JOY.

FOR THE BABY:

- Helps the digestive system function more efficiently.
- Regular bowel movements and an improved quality of sleep.
- Improves baby's flexibility and creates a growing source of strength inside them.
- It gives your baby an opportunity to be more active. They

are strapped in so much in daily life, that to breathe and stretch unrestrained is bliss.

FOR BOTH OF YOU:

- You create an expanding sense of wellbeing.
- Can create a true bond of happiness between the both of you.
- It is an excellent bonding practice that can help nurture your new relationship.
- It is a good opportunity to really get to know how to handle your baby. They are quite resilient and can be held quite energetically, which is very helpful for development of motor skills and socialization.
- If you practiced pregnancy yoga, then this is just a continuation of the growing relationship that you have with your baby. But this time instead of feeling them breathe inside, they are right there outside breathing with you, giggling with you enjoying the time spent together in happy harmony.
- I have adapted a yoga class to enable mother and baby to practice together and here are a few suggestions that both of you can enjoy and reap benefit from.
- A good time to practice is after a bath when you are both calm but refreshed. Leave a few hours after a meal yourself. Slightly less for babies as they eat more often than we do.

This practice is based with my son James who is now twelve months. Yoga can be practiced from birth, and the postures here



are for all ages unless specified. Yoga evolves as the baby grows and some positions can be introduced to suit the older baby with more vigorous movement, and ability to sit crawl or stand. Whenever baby is upset do not try to work through it but move on. This is a time for softness and acceptability. Accept that it may not go completely to plan and that baby's plans may be different to yours. Practice in a warm room, and clear a space big enough to lie down in and move the arms and legs about in. Wear comfy clothing. Time can vary from ~~ten~~ to forty-five minutes depending how old or attentive your baby is.

- Remember this is a time for both of you, however short it is precious!

SITTING RELAXATION

1. Sit cross-legged with your baby in front, facing away. Roll your shoulders around and release them down on a good exhale. Now breathe naturally, just letting go. Sit here for a few breaths.
2. Stretch and relax. While still sitting, hold both babies' hands. Stretch baby's arms up on the inhale. Release them down on the exhale.
3. Do this for a few repetitions. Then vary the stretch out to the sides, opening the arms wide on the inhale, and closing them on the exhale. Repeat a few times.

KNEES INTO CHEST

Lie your baby down on their back and kneel in front of them. Bring each knee one by one into their chest, trying to exhale as you bring the knee in and inhale as you bring the knee out. After a few times practice with both knees.

MINI TWIST

With your baby on their back, bring the left leg up and over the right, to create a twist. Lightly hold down their left shoulder. Repeat on the other side.

HIP CIRCLE

This is a continuation of the previous two movements. Rotate the baby's knees around together, rolling them around on their back. Rotate one way for a few circles and then the other way. This gives a really good massage to the internal organs and helps reduce constipation, and eliminates gas and bloating.

SWINGING

1. Hold your baby face down. Your right hand underneath their chest tucked close to their armpit, the other through the legs. Have your legs wide with your knees bent. Always keep the knees slightly bent to help protect the lower back.
2. Start to swing the baby from left to right, down to up in a large rocking motion. After approximately five to ten sways, move your baby around to the other side.

3. To bring them over from left to right, bring them up facing you and lift them up high. Move them to the other side. Energize through the stomach to help you find your centre of gravity. This will help you to stabilize yourself when your baby becomes heavier. Keep the shoulders relaxed. Just let yourself go in this one, with big movements, really enjoying the sounds your baby responds with.

STANDING LEG LIFT TWISTS

1. Come to standing. Hold your baby in a relaxed position in front of your body. As you lift the left leg, twist the body around to the left. Swing your baby around at the same time.

2. Release and repeat on the other side. Repeat both sides five to ten times. Suitable over three months.

BABY WARRIOR

1. Stand with the feet together. Bring your left leg forward and bend your left knee. Don't make your stance too deep as to struggle back, but deep enough to feel the force of the asana.

2. Sit and hold your baby on your left leg with your left arm. Their backs will be into your stomach and chest. Bring the right arm up and really breathe into this for a few breaths.

3. Come up and repeat on the other side. Suitable over three months.

STOMACH CURL COMBO

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Hold your baby facing down with their head facing you, their torso on your shins. Your head on the floor.

2. As you exhale bring your knees towards your head, and lift your head up. As you inhale release the knees away and relax the head back down. Repeat five to ten times. You can try and kiss your baby's forehead, or just make ahhhh sounds as you exhale closer to them. Suitable over four months.

STOMACH CURL WITH LEG RAISE

1. Continue to lie on your back with your knees bent and your baby on your shins. Keep the head on the floor at all times.

2. On an exhale lift the legs from bent knee to straight. Hold your baby with your hands placed each side of their hips.

3. As you inhale bend the knees back to the starting position. Practice this five to ten times. Suitable over four months.

BABY BOAT

1. Sit with knees slightly bent and feet placed on the floor. Sit your baby on your lap with their back to your chest, and their legs on yours.

2. Hold them lightly around the waist with each hand.

3. Lean back slightly to adjust the balance to lift the legs. Try to keep them together. Breathe here for a few breaths then release on an exhale back down to knees bent. Practice two to three times.





STANDING SQUAT AND LIFT

1. Stand with the legs wide apart holding your baby in front of you firmly around the waist. Do half repetitions with baby facing you and the other half with baby facing away.

As you exhale bend the knees, dropping the baby's feet to the floor so that they are just standing on their feet. Keep the back straight, and the stomach energized.

2. As you inhale lift them all the up to above your head in a good long stretch. Keep them close to you as you bring them up to help protect your spine. This will help prevent overstretching. Bring the spine up straight to help the rise, so that the flow of energy gets pushed upwards not outwards.

3. Your movement should be slow as you flow softly from one transition to the other. Really enjoy the whoosh factor. Your baby should be enjoying the freedom of being higher than you, for a few moments. Repeat five to ten times. Suitable for over 8 months.

WIDE LEG FORWARD BEND FLOW

1. Sit with your legs out wide and your baby sitting facing you with their legs out wide. Hold their hands. As you inhale pull them slightly forward so that they gently move into a forward bend.

2. On the exhale bring them up by coming down yourself to a

forward bend. Continue this rowing motion for a few breaths. Enjoy the movement as if you are rowing your boat of bliss down the river. Suitable over 6 months.

LYING DOWN RELAXATION

1. Lie down on your back with your legs relaxed and your feet rolling out to the sides. Have your baby lying face down on your body their head over your chest, so that they can hear your heart-beat beating away within you. This will help them to settle down into your grasp.

2. Hold them with either one or two hands around their back. Begin to try and settle the breath and mentally feel the release down with each exhale. Your baby will enjoy the softness and sink down into your loving embrace. Be here for as long as you can, existing serenely in your own little yoga womb of harmony.

Important note: As with any exercise, be sure to carry out only what you feel comfortable for you and your baby. If you have any doubt, stop and move onto the next posture.

Models: Samantha and James

Images shot at Peak Health & Fitness, Andover, Hampshire.

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