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Birthing a **NEW YOU**

Pregnancy is not all about the baby. Prenatal care is a fantastic way to inculcate new, better lifestyle habits for yourself and learn to relax.

By Juhi Baveja

Pregnancy might leave you with a love-hate relationship with your body, and it might irreversibly alter you. But there's no reason why you shouldn't take charge of your mind and body. Exercise is a boon, even when you're carrying. And combined with a right diet it will help you ease childbirth, getting back in shape, and life itself.

MOVING FOR ONE

Choosing your pregnancy as a time for behavioural modification – including eating habits, exercising, and mindfulness – might seem like a heavy task. If you haven't been a regular visitor at the gym or the race course, chances are the notion of twisting strategically might not seem like your cup of tea.

"Start small. Walk – make it breezy, leisurely, and conversational. Parks and seashores are the best venues, and take the time off to pamper yourself in the lap of nature," says Dr Priya Talwar, Vinayak Hospital, Noida. "But if you want to be able to shed off those kilos after childbirth (10-12 kg weight gain is normal) and learn to focus and have pain-coping techniques, doing yoga is your best bet."

Prenatal yoga is beneficial for those who wish to control their body movements while pushing the baby out or easing themselves into labour. "It is a beautiful process, and those looking for natural and drug-free deliveries might want to learn simple asanas like *Vakrasna* (twisting the spine to the right and left side, so that the joints can be exercised), *Konasana*

(joining the heels of both legs while sitting in a crossed legs pose), and *Bhadrasana* (butterfly pose, good for your inner thighs)," adds Talwar.

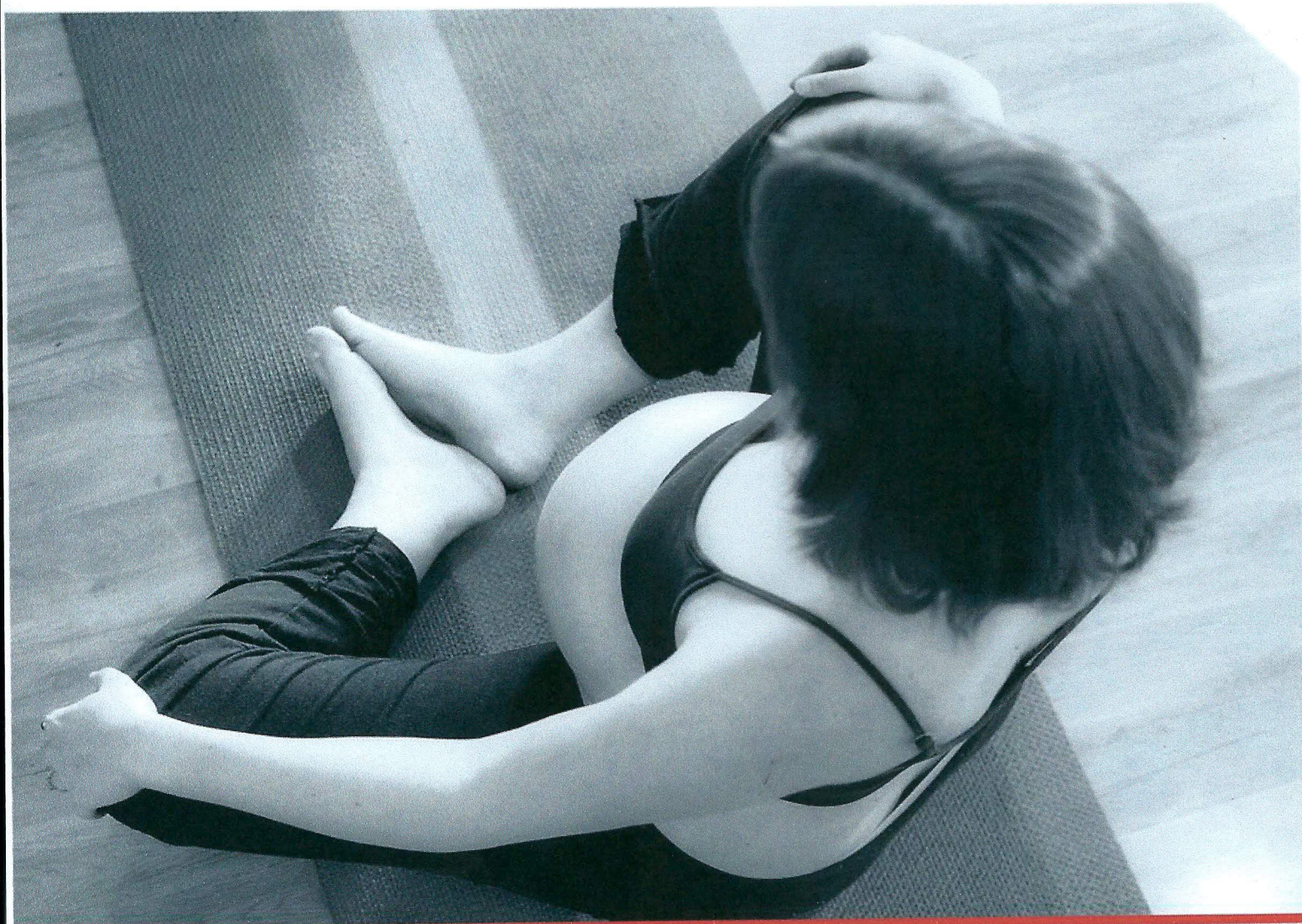
The gym might seem like a hot-bed for heavy activity and sweaty bodies, but some parts of your expanding body might be thankful if you decide to head to one. "During the course of one's pregnancy, the abdominal weight is sizably increased, leading to stiffness in the lower back region. Therefore, an emphasis on tilting the pelvis back to a more neutral posture with push-ups and planks is essential. Those who have done weight training earlier can continue with lighter weights and longer reps to keep the muscles toned as joints and muscles suffer from under use during pregnancy," advises Sumit Thakore, a personal trainer at Talwalkar's Gym, New Delhi.

However, come morning sickness and nausea, and your mind might go off the treadmill. You want to feel supported, loved, and free, and not necessarily challenge yourself.

Now recommended by most doctors in the country, 'Lamaze' is a combination of all things your body needs. Inspired by ancient Russian childbirth practices, Lamaze involves breathing and relaxation techniques under the supervision of a 'monitrice', or a midwife. Marjorie Karmel, an American in Paris, was the first to have written about adapting the methods to deliver her first baby. Espoused by celebrity mothers like Shilpa Shetty, Gwyneth Paltrow and Marissa Tomei, and mommy blogs alike, Lamaze essentially changes your brain chemistry – and leaves you with a peaceful

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therapists will help you reduce,” she adds. By the time your body gets use to the pregnancy weight, your stress issues have been left unaddressed. “Meditation over medication is my motto. I think one must steer clear of over-indulgence or reclusive behaviour. Meditation and *pranayam* will always help you balance your mind, body, and soul,” says Aneja.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Although WebMD and other self-help online medical forums might tell you that insomnia and fatigue in pregnant women can be cured by aerobic exercises, it is wise to ease into the routines and not push yourself. “After

three months you shouldn't do high-intensity exercises. The trick is to relax your joints, as your lower half of the body is constantly aching from all the weight. Squatting is a good thing, but deep lunges can cause pain,” warns Dr Shah. “Don't do what doesn't feel natural to you,” adds Thakore. Consult a fitness expert and your doc before starting something new.

MOVING TOWARDS LIFE

Experts say it is the care you take of yourself during the initial stage of your pregnancy that impacts your health post-pregnancy. As a new life takes shape within you, take the time to centre yourself. **W**