

Yoga positions that pregnant women should not consider

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June 19, 2005
The Sun-Herald

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One of the dangerous poses.
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Pregnant women are hurting themselves and risking their unborn children by practising some common yoga poses, experts say.

An informal committee including midwives and obstetricians has been set up to develop guidelines for safe practice of the popular activity.

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital childbirth educator Enid Guthrie, who is spearheading the committee, said she had seen women with ruptured membranes, and there was a risk of miscarriage for women who did inappropriate poses.

Mrs Guthrie said she did not let her pregnant yoga students do inversions - including the downward facing dog and shoulder stand - partly because the hormone relaxin causes the ligaments that hold the uterus to soften during pregnancy. Other "no-no" positions were intense twists, sit-ups and strong stretches.

Mrs Guthrie said that, while she had no scientific evidence that yoga could cause miscarriage, her concern was based on her experience as a midwife, theatre nurse and prenatal yoga teacher of 13 years.

She said many women signed up for yoga classes when they fell pregnant, thinking it was a gentle activity.

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"It's the women who have never done yoga before they get pregnant who I am most concerned about," she said.

She warned pregnant women should not rely on yoga DVDs, unless they already knew the yoga practitioner and had been to their classes.

Generally, they should not be doing yoga in the first trimester because of the danger of miscarriage. Women's health physiotherapist Julia Schwarz, who is also on the committee, said prenatal yoga teachers needed to have some obstetrics training to understand the particular changes in a pregnant woman's body.

"With pregnant women you need to be careful. You are not dealing with a normal body," she said.

Ms Schwarz said women with pubic symphysis, which causes groin pain and can occur after 20 weeks of pregnancy, should not be allowed to squat, sit cross-legged or do one-legged poses.

She also said pregnant women with sacroiliac joint dysfunction needed to avoid lying on their backs.

Prenatal yoga teacher Sally Molineaux said if women were very fit and experienced in yoga, she allowed them to do inverted poses - but only at their own risk: "I tell them they can only do certain poses if they take responsibility for it themselves," she said.

"I do not think women should be doing inversions and strong twists during pregnancy."

Sports Medicine Australia director Anita Green said anyone teaching an exercise class or yoga to pregnant women required additional expertise.

"Yoga is good, but it needs to be modified accordingly for each stage of pregnancy," Dr Green said.

AMA's obstetrics spokesman Andrew Pesce said there was no evidence that yoga was anything other than beneficial and safe in pregnancy. However he said women should listen to their bodies.

"My advice is: if you're doing something and it hurts, you shouldn't be doing it any more," Dr Pesce said.

Dangerous poses

Pre-natal yoga teacher, Sally Molineaux, demonstrates some of the potentially harmful poses.

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