

# PREGNANT AND FIT

You'll need: A pair of Yoga Tune Up® therapy balls (or other grippy ball), a Coregeous® ball (or overball), a strap, a block (or blanket).



You're pregnant, congratulations!

While those nine months are a time for joy and going with the flow, it can also be wrought with challenges: achy backs, swollen feet and labored breath are just a few of the common complaints pregnant women experience. Integrated Yoga Tune Up® teacher **Emilie Mikulla** shares her tips and advice to overcome these woes, so you can live better in your body during pregnancy and beyond.

## 1 RECAPTURE YOUR POSTURE

Are you leading belly first and rolling your shoulders back, flaring the ribs, in an attempt to stand up straight? From hindering your capacity to breathe fully, to stressing the spine and increasing tension on your anterior abdominal wall, poor posture can spell head to toe trouble.

Here's how you can stand up for yourself to allow better breathing mechanics, decrease spinal load and minimize the risk of Diastasis Recti (see boxout for more information about DR).

Feet first. Hip socket distance apart, facing straight forward as though going on a downhill slope on skis. Weight back enough on the heels that you can lift your toes, equal weight on both feet. Ankles and hips in line.

Your domes. Picture your ribcage and pelvis as two domes. You want them to sit one on top of one another. I like to picture them as nets. If I were to drop a YTU ball into one net, it would fall straight into the second net. You achieve this by aligning your xiphoid process (bottom of the sternum) with your public bone. Finding this alignment will also help you reduce flaring of the ribs (a common tendency in the general population and even more so in pregnant women). Your diaphragm is now ready to make its full excursion without any obstacles along the way. Say hello to better breath!

Your head. Thanks to mobile devices, we now live in a forward head society. Put your head back on your spine by pushing it back gently as though pressing against the headrest of a car seat, chin slightly down, ears in line with shoulders. Not only will finding proper head placement help you release tension in the upper back and neck, it will also improve your balance, coordination and proprioception (the ability to determine where your body is in space).



## pose

### 2 BABY GOT BACK

As your precious cargo grows, so will the load on your spine, causing some tenderness in that region. Give your tissues more slide and glide with this upper back sequence and add the Siberian Squeeze to stay pain-free, stabilize your shoulders and create a solid foundation for you to carry your bundle of joy around when the time comes.

**Roll it out:** At the wall. Bend your knees, place two toted therapy balls between your shoulder blades and lean a bit away from the wall. Inhale to move the shoulders forward (the shoulder blades will come apart) and exhale to squeeze the shoulder blades together, trying to crush the therapy balls. Repeat 5-10 times.



**Strengthen:** Bring your arms out into cactus or goalpost. Inhale to bring the elbows and pinky fingers together, pressing through the midline. Exhale to flip the palms so they are facing you. Inhale and lift the elbows up as high as possible, keeping them squeezing together. Exhale to open your elbows out to the side creating a diamond shape. Inhale, exhale, slowly bring your elbows to your imaginary side pockets, moving slowly as through honey. Repeat 5 times.



### 3 POWERFUL PELVIS

Your pelvis is the pedestal upon which your spine sits. Its muscles need to be strong yet supple to handle the additional stress pregnancy puts on the spine and hips, but also to allow smooth passage for your little guest on D-Day. This leg stretch series will help decongest the hamstrings and adductors, decompress the spine, as well as build core strength, from your transverse abdominis to your pelvic floor muscles.

**Setup:** At the wall. Lie down on your right side and place your strap on your left instep, right foot is at the bottom of the wall, head on a block, blanket or pillow. Engage your core (bottom side waist will lift thus engaging your spinal stabilizers) and depress your left pelvic bone to create length on both sides of your waist. Push right foot into the floor and hold for 30 seconds to one minute to feel the hips switch on.

Light up your adductors by lifting your right leg off the floor (8-10 times), finishing with a few circles in each direction (not shown). Then lift left leg off the floor (without allowing the pelvis to roll back) – your adductors will get a wonderful release.

Switch legs, and place left foot on the wall at hip height, taking care to stack the hips and engage your core musculature. Push right foot into the ground and, at the same time, lift the wall upwards with your left leg for several breaths, then downwards, without moving your foot. Repeat the entire sequence on the other side.



#### 4 SOLE SAVER

Who hasn't heard of poor blood circulation during pregnancy? As weeks turn into months you may start to feel heavier in your lower limbs and may even experience swelling. In just a few minutes on the therapy ball, you can stimulate blood flow, rehydrate stiff tissues and release the entire backline of your body.

**Setup:** At the wall. Place one Yoga Tune Up® therapy ball on the arch of the foot, heel down, and press on the gas pedal. Move the ankle left and right so the ball travels across the sole of the foot. Repeat along your entire sole, from balls of the feet to your heel; finish by rolling over the entire foot in any direction you like, pausing in areas that 'knead' it. Remember to breathe. 3 to 5 minutes on each foot.



#### 5 BREATH RESET

As the uterus moves up over the belly button and the size your baby carriage increases, you can often be left feeling breathless and stuck in and around the ribcage area. This simple move will not only allow you to mobilize your breathing muscles, it will also maintain the range of motion of your thoracic spine.

**Set up:** On your mat. Place the Coregeous® ball on your left chest; left leg out in front of you, right leg behind, both knees bent. Head down on the floor or on your fists or block for more support. Breathe deeply and consciously into the sides and the back of your ribcage to unlock tension. If comfortable use your hand to deepen the twist by pressing down onto the ribs. After 1-2 minutes, switch sides and repeat.

#### DIASTASIS RECTI

Also called DR, abdominal wall separation doesn't have to be something that you're just left to deal with after giving birth. Here are a few dos and don'ts:

1 Avoid exercises that place excessive load on your anterior abdominal wall: retire poses such as full wheel, sit ups, and boat pose. Instead, focus on movements that support your spinal corset, such as side plank at the wall and the leg stretch series.

2 Recapture your posture, reset your breath and be mindful of how you move. When getting out of bed, first press yourself up, swing your legs around, then stand.

3 Re-consider your toilet habits. Elevating the feet on yoga blocks or books will put your colon in a more optimal position for you to evacuate waste without strain.



Having contracted a major case of wanderlust, Emilie has traveled the world, working as journalist, and has taught in Bangkok, Johannesburg, San Francisco and now Dubai. She is an Integrated Yoga Tune Up® instructor, an E-RYT with Yoga Tree San Francisco; and, a Pilates teacher. She

also spent hundreds of hours assisting Yoga Tree SF Teacher Trainer and physiotherapist Harvey Deutch, in his clinic, teacher trainings and on retreats at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, CA. Emilie's powerful yet therapeutic classes will help you map your body from the inside out and give you the selfcare tools you need to keep practicing the activities you love for a long time. [www.emsyoga.net](http://www.emsyoga.net).