

Yoga for Mama's Mood: Healing Tools for PMAD

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Opening Practice: Tonglen for Mothers

"Tonglen is a traditional Buddhist practice of compassion. In order to have compassion for ourselves, we cultivate it for others. We take in the difficult parts of mothering, for ourselves and for all mothers and send out compassion and love."

This version is by DeLona Campos-Davis

From the book *Honoring Motherhood: Prayers, Ceremonies, & Blessings* by Lynn L. Caruso

*I breathe in the daily frustrations
small as they are, big as they can seem
I breathe out patience for us all.*

*I breathe in the loneliness
of days spent mothering on our own
I breathe out connection
community, compassion.*

*I breathe in the brokenness
not being enough in the world
I breathe out wholeness
leaving ideals behind, truth.*

*I breathe in the boredom
diapers, cooking, same every day*

*I breathe out simple pleasure
swings, finger painting, rocks.*

*I breathe in the exhaustion,
the worry, the fear
I breathe out calm energy, excitement.*

*I breathe in the rage
at your plight, your place, your life
I breathe out peace
contentment, courage.*

By DeLona Campos-Davis

What is Yoga?

- Meditation? Contortion? A workout? Something you do in special pants?
- Yoga is the action of connecting—body, mind, heart—in the service of stability and knowledge of our true nature.
- There are many traditional practices that can fall under the title “Yoga.” Today we will refer to mindfully held postures, movement linked with breath, controlled breathing practices, and various types of meditation.

Yoga? For Mama’s Mood?

- Yoga (poses, breath, meditation) is a free, portable, non-stigmatizing tool that can be used by mamas in community and on their own to prevent and heal from PMAD. It has no side effects and lots of side benefits.
- Yoga supports many of Jane Honikman’s (founder of PSI) *9 Steps to Wellness*.



Steps to Wellness & How Yoga Helps

1. Education

- “Svadyaya or or “self-study.”
 - Observe body, mind and heart
 - Notice what *guna* (quality) our mood takes
 - Notice effect of different behaviors on well-being.
 - Practice noticing with compassion and non-judgment.
- Yoga can be one time that a woman has an opportunity to learn directly from herself and her body with no one’s input.
- This type of self-education can help a woman begin to develop trust in herself as a mother.

“As you practice mindfulness, the capacity to trust yourself grows, and inner strength, confidence, and self-reliance emerge, helping you take full responsibility for your choices and your actions. This kind of trust is not about anything external. It’s not about “trusting the birth process” or “trusting your body,” for if you adopt this way of thinking and your birth doesn’t go as you’d wish or expect, you may find yourself rushing headlong into the pain of the judging mind. Mindfulness practice offers a different kind of trust—a *trust in yourself, a trust that you can handle whatever unfolds during pregnancy, in your birth experience, or with your baby, no matter how challenging, difficult, painful, scary, or far from what you imagined it might be.*”

—Nancy Bardacke, *Mindful Birthing*

Steps to Wellness & How Yoga Helps

2. Sleep

- Gentle and restorative asana practices (“*langhana*”) calm the body (move from sympathetic to parasympathetic nervous system).
- Active and strong asana practices (“*brahmana*”) can release and direct nervous energy, setting you up for a soothing rest.
- Mindful body scan for insomnia
- *Yoga nidra*, meaning “yoga sleep,” to recoup sleep debt

Steps to Wellness & How Yoga Helps

3. Nutrition

- Mindful eating
- A yoga asana practice can put you more in touch with your body’s signals of hunger, fullness, pleasure, displeasure, energy and exhaustion.



Steps to Wellness & How Yoga Helps

4. Exercise/Time for Self

- Asana practice is both exercise and time for self.
- Asana helps with aches and pains of pregnancy and new motherhood and increases strength and endurance.
- A yoga practice can include strong poses that give an empowering experience of strength, perseverance, flexibility, confidence, competence, and mastery.
- Daily silent meditation (for even 5 minutes) to develop an observing/witness mind, dis-identify from thoughts and feelings, and heal disruptive patterns in the nervous system.



Steps to Wellness & How Yoga Helps

5. Get Support: Emotional and Practical

- Pre/Postnatal Yoga community can be a great source of support, help mothers feel less alone and develop self-compassion
- Check-in at beginning of class to provide a space for non-judgmental sharing
- Teachers and other mothers can share resources with one another



What is the “best” practice for PMAD?

- Because PMAD take so many forms, there is not one “good practice” for each mother’s healing.
- A woman can choose the best practice for her by identifying the quality of her mood (i.e. depression, anxiety, exhaustion, restlessness...)and choosing a practice that supports balance.

Two types of yoga practice

- *Brahmana* practices: expansive and increase physical energy.

- Strong standing poses
- Sun salutations/*vinyasas* (movement with breath)
- Invigorating breath practices



- *Langhana* practices: slow, quieting, and invite the parasympathetic nervous system to take over

- Restorative
- Yin
- Gentle yoga
- Breath practice (long exhalations)



How to practice: Option 1

Choose an opposite energy

If PMAD has a depressed, lethargic, heavy quality...

Choose a more brahmana style of practice to enliven and invigorate. Include active poses and vigorous breathing.

If PMAD has a strong agitated or anxious quality...

Choose a more langhana style of practice. Slowing down, quieting the body, and engaging the parasympathetic nervous system will allow in more peace and relaxation.

How to practice: Option 2

Meet yourself "where you are"

If PMAD has a depressed quality and you are too tired and burnt out...

start with langhana. Bring the light of attention to the body and self to soothe you and leave you with more energy.

If PMAD has a strong agitated/anxious quality and you are too restless and to relax...

start with a mindful, deliberate brahmana practice to get release nervous energy. Then, perhaps, at the end of your practice, you will have calmed your nervous system and be able to have a soothing rest.

For our practice today...

- Each person needs something very different, release comparisons.
- Each pose comes with choices—you always get to choose what you want/need for your body. What I (or any teacher) says is not always right for you.
- Experimentation is often needed to figure out what you need today.
- Feel free to rest or slow it down.
- If you judge your choice, you've found a great opportunity to practice self-compassion.
- Notice the small pieces of practice that a pregnant or new mom could do at home or work in just three minutes. Notice things you could do while holding a baby, in bed, with an older kid around, etc.



List of practices

- Meditation: mind, body, heart check-in
- Commitment: to awareness, to reminding yourself of the value of your practice and that it is possible to practice inclusive of all feelings and circumstances
- Tibetan Sun Salutations--opening and closing
- Shoulder stretches
- Joint freeing
- Standing warriors
- Supported rest
- Tonglen
