



Fertility Yoga

Mary Pappas-Sandonas, MS CIYT C-IAYT is a certified Level 3 Iyengar yoga teacher and has been teaching Iyengar yoga for over 25 years. She has taught Iyengar yoga for pregnancy and pre-conception classes at Unity Woods Yoga Center in addition to classes for beginning, intermediate and advanced practitioners. She originally developed the Yoga for Fertility Program at Shady Grove Fertility Center to support patients and their partners on their journey. Mary has developed and directed 2 separate yoga therapy programs in an Integrative primary care practice and in a hospital integrative medicine department. In addition to being an experienced Iyengar yoga teacher, Mary had years of personal experience with the challenges of infertility, IUI and IVF cycles and multiple miscarriages. She gave birth to her daughter in 2005, after 17 years on that path. She credits her years of yoga practice with its physical, breathing, energetic, and its spiritual components to having kept her present, healthy in body and mind, and open, receptive, compassionate, and accepting while on this tumultuous journey, even during the darkest times. Through the different stages in an IVF cycle, it was Iyengar yoga, with its focused precision, attention to detail, and skillful use of supportive yoga postures, both active and passive individualized for the different stages within a cycle, and breathing techniques that provided a refuge, a safe haven from the physical and mental challenges of the process. Through the hopeful highs, the uncertainties, and the crushing blows of grief and loss, yoga in its various forms offer solace and serves as a steady, constant companion. During the dark nights of the soul, engulfed in the confusion, frustration and anger, consciously taking one breath at a time, as the awareful witness, we move inward to touch the sacred space of the heart and the spacious inherent speck of Universal joy, compassion and hope that is ever-present, and always available to us, inviting us to live and make mindful choices from our true nature. Fertility treatments can pull us into the whirlwind of consuming demands, yearning desires and stressful uncertainties. It's easy to lose ourselves within it all. The practice of Iyengar yoga with its postures, breathing exercises, meditation, relaxation, and positive mental imagery and self-talk coupled with skillful medical intervention interrupts this conflict while releasing tension creating the most favorable conditions for conception and pregnancy.

Yoga supported Mary keeping herself and her daughter healthy and safe through her successful pregnancy and delivery. She taught her regular yoga classes throughout her pregnancy and taught on the morning of her due date, delivering her beautiful daughter after her first contraction that occurred right after the private yoga session that she was teaching and subsequently laboring for 7 hours and 23 minutes.

Through postures that strengthen the spine and the physical body, which bring increased blood flow to the pelvis, creating space in the abdominal organs, that quietly balance the hormonal and nervous systems, and decrease the overwhelming stress response, the various groups of postures nourish and prepare the yoga student for the demands of pre-conception, pregnancy, birth and healthy post-partum recovery as they revivify, nourish and deeply relax the body-mind. They prime the body-mind to be in the best shape possible which positively affects health, well-being and fertility.



Iyengar yoga allows us to work from the inside out to find our physical and spiritual center to trust in the bigger picture as we grow in physical and mental strength and flexibility. In awakening the body's intelligence, fertility is positively promoted.

Clarity of mind is illuminated as a result of the refined discernment and discrimination that the Iyengar method of yoga cultivates within the practice. As a result, we begin to see and act mindfully, sensitively, with care and compassion for ourselves through an expanded awareness that embraces knowledge and the wisdom of the heart. Through our yoga practices we experience a stilling of the mental fluctuations when the busy, worrying mind enters into the feedback loops of the "if-onlies" of what might have been and what could be in the future, sending us spiraling into losing touch with the present moment, with the body, the breath, and the self. Yoga practices are very effective in pulling us back to the now and help us to alleviate the suffering that is caused by the concentrated attachment to outcomes. We move away from viewing our lives from the lens of overwhelming desire, fear and hopelessness and settle into faith and trust, remaining open to possibilities promoting healing, grounding and a renewed sense of self and spirit.

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