

Breastfeeding and Yoga

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As a three times breastfeeding mum and an Iyengar yoga practitioner, I feel very passionate about breastfeeding in a world where it is more and more on the verge of extinction.

We all know that breastfeeding is best for mum and baby. In fact, the World Health Organisation recommends: "Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. At six months, other foods should complement breastfeeding for up to two years or more." Despite these guidelines, the UK sadly ranks top in bottle feeding rates in all Europe; and nowadays 50% of women give up breastfeeding when their babies are only six weeks old.

Thus, how can our yoga practice support us while we are breastfeeding? Over the years while breastfeeding and practising yoga, I have realised that my energy levels tend to fluctuate enormously. The other way round also held true: the way I practised yoga seemed to make an impact on breastfeeding. Breastfeeding a newborn during the early weeks or a baby who is not yet on solids is quite time and energy consuming, while nursing a one year old once or twice a day in established lacta-

tion can be less tiring. In that sense, how often and how much I was nursing seemed to affect my yoga practice differently.

Geetaji states the importance of breastfeeding by saying that: "The child must have pure breast feeding." She recommends soon after delivery the practice of Savasana and Ujjayi Pranayama I as it helps the establishment of lactation: "Pranayama and Savasana ensure that milk is purified, and lactation increased." Afterwards she recommends a series of asanas that "stimulate the pituitary gland which secretes prolactin that controls lactation." Similarly, Dr. Krishna Raman recommends: "For the first three months, no exercises are to be practised. This is to allow the body to recover. It is also to prevent interference with lactation of breast milk, as exercises change hormonal responses."

In Mexico, the "cuarentena" refers to approximately 40 "golden days" where mums are pampered and taken care of by other family members. Geetaji underlined the importance of this postnatal period: "The mother has to feel healthy and get her strength back, at this

time, and build up energy to continue her responsibility of motherhood." Interestingly enough, these 40 days (approximately four to six weeks) correspond to the time it takes for the full establishment of our milk supply.

I must confess that during my "cuarentena" with my first child I did nothing other than variations of Savasana when I had a chance. Back then in Mexico, my main teacher, Herta Rogg, suggested I follow Geetaji's *Yoga: A Gem for Women's* guidelines on postpartum yoga practice and beyond. With my second child also born in Mexico a few years after, it took me even longer to re-establish my yoga practice. I had to juggle with a baby and a toddler, and had little time to myself and very little energy left.

My third child Ilan was born in the comfort of our home in London. I had religiously attended Johanna Heckmann-Mohan's pregnancy classes at the IYIMV. Several months down the road after giving birth, I was keen to resume my classes.

As I started attending the Institute once again, I spoke to

