

# GARBHA SANSKAR:

## *The Journey Through Pregnancy*

*In the previous Volume, we introduced Garbha Sanskar, the Ayurvedic practice that describes the care to be taken by expecting couples, especially the mother, from conception up until after the delivery of the newborn.*

### IN BRIEF

1. Garbha Sanskar provides a comprehensive set of practices to ensure the well-being of the pregnant mother and baby before, during and after pregnancy.
2. This article describes the practice of virtues, discipline, asanas and pranayama to nurture a clear mind and healthy body for both the expectant mother and the baby.
3. This ancient wisdom will help build virtuous, intelligent and healthy future generations if practiced diligently. Indeed, education starts in the womb.

The *Upanishads* describe human existence based on the theory of *panchakosha* (5 sheaths). These sheaths are faculties that should be harmonized so that their energies are channeled in the right direction. The 5 layers are:

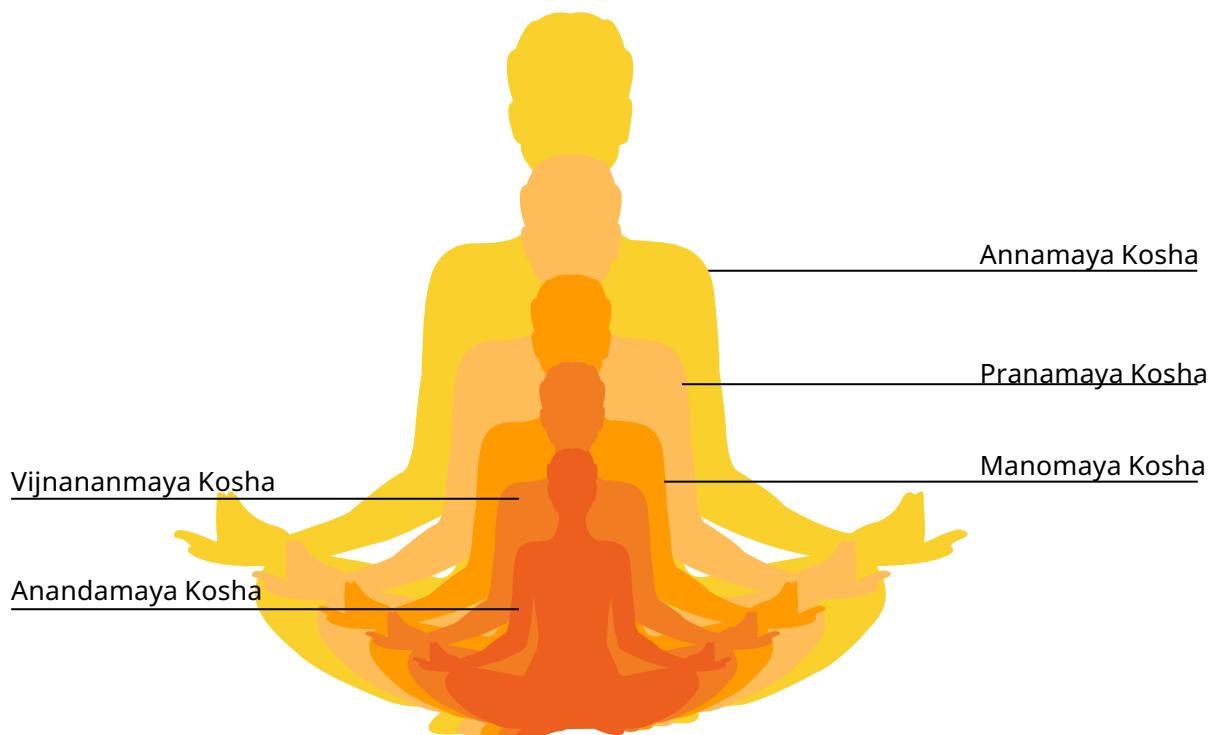
1. *Annamaya kosha*: the gross body made from the food we eat.
2. *Pranamaya kosha*: the layer through which energy flows to sustain life.
3. *Manomaya kosha*: the layer which conducts emotions and feelings.

4. *Vijnananmaya kosha*: the layer responsible for logic and reasoning.
5. *Anandamaya kosha*: the layer responsible for bliss/spirituality.

When any of these layers is disturbed, diseases appear in some form or other. During pregnancy, we aim for balance between these layers so that the energy is channeled for the optimum growth and development of the fetus.

The Garbha Sanskar ritual not only takes care of the physical body but also the subtler levels of the being so it is a holistic approach to well-being.

Garbha Sanskar brings about a deeper, long-lasting spiritual connection between the consciousness of the baby and the consciousness of the pregnant mother.



## Virtues & Discipline For A Clear Mind & A Healthy Body

Virtues and disciplines (do's and don'ts) are practiced to develop clarity of mind and healthy functioning of the body. Medical sciences have shown that most diseases are psychosomatic in nature. Our mind creates distress and yet it, too, is a source of pleasure. One therefore needs to stay in an equanimous and balanced state for the health of mind and body.

### *Yamas Or Virtues*

There are a few principles that are the prerequisites for the Garbha Sanskar ritual or asana practice. These prerequisites are not just applicable to the pregnant mother, they are applicable to all of us. They are really life principles that we need to follow for better living. They are called yamas. For a successful journey of life, we need to inculcate these virtues:

#### ***Ahimsa: non-violence***

This not only means not harming others, but also means to be kind and compassionate toward oneself. For example, do not exert extra force when doing an asana and listen to hunger and other cues from the body. Non-violence includes not having painful negative self-talk.

#### ***Aparigraha: non-acquisition***

Non-acquisition of things, non-hoarding of thoughts and material objects. Beauty is letting go in order to create new space for change and growth. It also means letting go of old negative patterns and welcoming positivity in one's life.

#### ***Satya: truthfulness***

Make heart and lips as one. This means making speech and action correspond to reality. Purity of mind and thoughts come with truthfulness.

### **Yamas Or Virtues**

#### ***Brahmacharya: honesty***

Honesty to your life partner in thought, word and deed. It means loving your partner with full conviction. This creates a natural bond between the couple as well as between the father and the baby.

#### ***Asteya: non-stealing***

Non-stealing of material and non-material things. A person who is not ethical in behavior cannot really progress in life.

## Niyamas Or Discipline

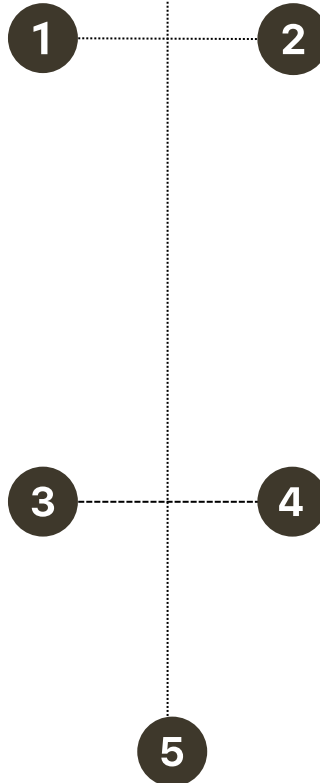
Yamas are the virtues but they can't exist without discipline. Discipline is practiced physically and mentally. These disciplines are called niyamas:

### ***Saucha*: cleanliness of mind and body**

Cleanliness is not only of the physical self, it is also keeping thoughts clean as well. Showering, brushing teeth, and combing hair are techniques for cleaning the body. But how to keep the mind clean? Yoga describes multiple ways to clean the mind; examples are worship, chanting and reading healthy literature.

### ***Tapa*: mastering the senses and mind**

For example, it can be done by staying disciplined in one's sleep and wake cycle. One need not fast or perform difficult rituals to perform tapa. Tapa is about experiencing life with equanimity through the polarities like heat and cold, pain and pleasure, etc.



### ***Santosh*: contentment**

Contentment is a very subjective feeling. A multimillionaire can be dissatisfied but a person from a humble background can be satisfied and happy. Contentment is not about holding back progress, and it's experienced at a deeper level. One can keep on doing his best work while contented. It's about staying satisfied while performing duties at one's best.

### ***Swadhyaya*: study of self**

Swadhyaya is a way of self-reflecting that helps us understand ourselves and even find our answers in difficult situations. It doesn't mean overthinking, instead, it helps us develop a witness-like attitude. Watching life like a movie, without being attached while keeping our mind centered. The techniques mentioned in *yoga japam* (mantra chanting) are reading good literature or just looking at the day with a witness-like attitude. We could journal or make a vision board.

### ***Ishwarpranidhaan*: surrender**

This important technique and prerequisite is to surrender to a higher reality. One surrenders because no one is to be blamed and also no one needs to be given credit. It's about dedicating all actions to a higher reality and leave everything to the higher reality and be at peace.

## In Support Of You

Life can be full of ups and downs. Take life as an experience of its journey and not as a destination. It can have a pleasurable moment, and the next moment could be a painful one. Just enjoy the show and not get attached to the experiences of life, which may seem difficult but it's not impossible to do so. All you need is to constantly remind yourself to not get attached and practice.

An alternative, or even better, way to practice is to be part of a support group of like-minded people. That's why we have *guru-shishya Parampara* or the teacher-disciple tradition. Guru means teacher or master and shishya is disciple or subject. A subject would always follow what the guru instructs with unconditional and unwavering faith.

In today's day and age, it's difficult to find such a guru but we do have qualified professionals who are masters in their subjects.

While performing any asana, it's important to have a teacher present to avoid any mishaps, especially during pregnancy. The teacher can explain if you are maintaining a good posture, doing the asana correctly or if the asana will help you or not. A student needs to surrender to the teacher and follow their instructions to get the maximum benefit of the asana.

## The Beauty In Simplicity

Social media have influenced the world to perform difficult postures in asanas. Such postures may uplift one's self-esteem but they are not as important as correctly moving the body for better health and well-being. One does not need to perform complicated inversions to get benefits, simple and authentic asanas are good enough for a proper functioning of mind and body.

## Asanas During Pregnancy

The idea of performing asanas during pregnancy is to improve circulation, in order to facilitate and enhance the chances of an easy vaginal delivery. It has been observed that 80 percent of mothers who perform Garbha Sanskar have easy and smooth vaginal deliveries. The babies are healthy and happy, they sleep and feed better — which are absolutely essential for their growth and development.

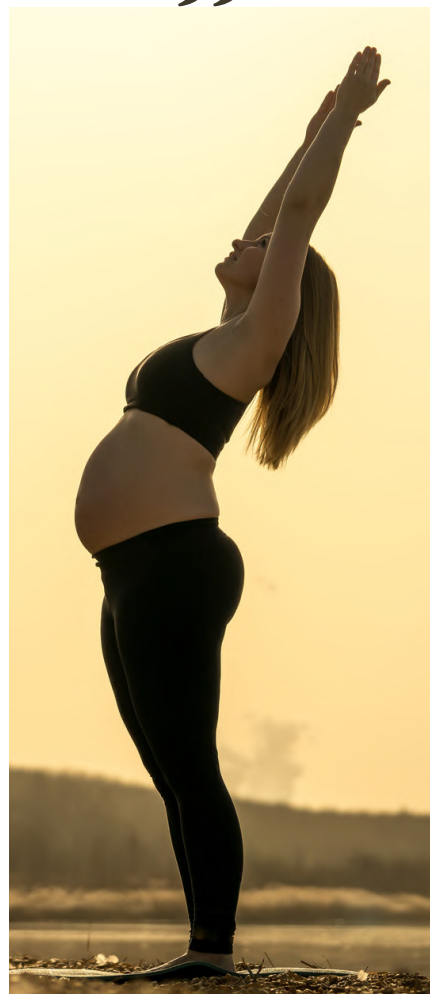
Here are few asanas that are recommended during pregnancy. **Please do these asanas under the strict supervision of a qualified instructor.** You are carrying a new life in your womb and a mistake could hurt the baby or cause discomfort. You and your baby's health and comfort are of utmost priority and are non-negotiable.

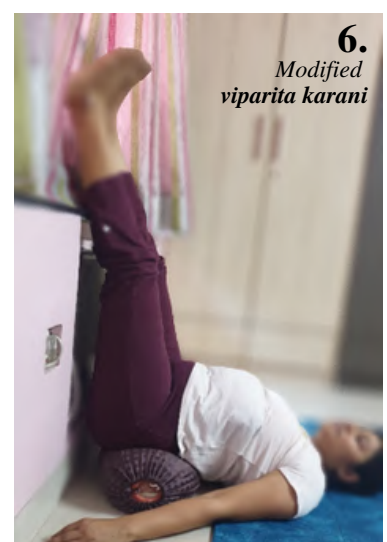
Also, remember that the first prerequisite is to not commit any *hinsa* (violence) to yourself. The asana should be performed *yatha-shakti*, that is, in accordance with one's capability and strength.

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**1. Vrikshasana:** tree pose. To strengthen the extremities, lengthen the spine and improve concentration. If balancing on one leg is difficult, use the support of a wall or a chair. Cheat code: to balance yourself, focus on a point at eye level. This makes balancing yourself easier.

**2. Ustrasana:** camel pose. Great for endocrine glands especially the thyroid. It improves circulation in abdomen and enhances digestion. This pose also increases circulation in the uterus hence improving muscle tone of the pelvic area, which is important for child birth. This asana strengthens the spine which is subject to a lot of pressure during pregnancy. Placing a blanket under your knees helps relieve pressure from the knees. One should not hesitate to use supports or props during asana practice as they can enhance the practice and reduce chances of discomfort or injury. The very idea of performing asanas is to increase comfort and reduce discomfort or pain. It's that simple.

**3. Matsyasana:** fish pose. Use a bolster or yoga block to support the back. The fish pose improves the pelvic floor muscles and also circulations in the spine and abdomen. It strengthens the spine and is a great asana for the pancreas and thyroid gland.

**4. Utkata konasana:** goddess pose. Squat wide to improve pelvic circulation and strengthen as well as tone the thighs. This pose also strengthens the glutes, inner thighs and calf muscles whilst correcting spinal alignment. It's a great practice for women with PCOD (Polycystic Ovarian Disease), PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) and infertility. This asana represents victory over all pains in life.

**5. Marjaryasana-Bitilasana:** cat-cow stretch. This stretches the spinal and uterine muscles while it strengthens both extremities. All vertebrae including cervical and coccyx (tail bone) are given movement. It's a great way to create space and improve mobility within the spine. An excellent back bend, this pose helps with reducing back pain and also sciatica pain.

**6. Modified viparita karani:** This modification uses the wall and bolster as supports. It improves circulation moving toward the uterus and digestive system and also helps in dealing with varicose veins. It improves fertility and helps with PCOD and menstrual cramps. It is also useful in cases of placenta previa or bleeding during pregnancy (reminder: medical supervision is a must). It is a very calming and relaxing pose. One can do belly breathing with this to connect with the baby and with oneself.

**7. Dhrudhaasana:** lying down on one side with pillow between legs. This is recommended throughout pregnancy and even at night for a comfortable sleep. It helps reduce pressure on the spine. You can use more pillows to support your back. This should be done in between asanas to catch the breath and relax, especially during the 3rd trimester when the belly is quite large because of the growing baby.

There are many more asanas that we prescribe during pregnancy. **Please NOTE that all these asanas must be performed with care and under an expert's strict supervision and guidance.**



### Pranayama (breathwork)

Pranayama are breathing practices that harmonize the flow of energy or prana within the body. Whilst asana practices are done for the physical body, pranayama is done for mental and emotional well-being.

Most asanas are synchronized with breathwork to enhance lung capacity. Pranayama is not merely breath control; it's a technique through which the prana in the body is activated to a higher frequency.

During any stage of life our mind has various fears, apprehensions, anxieties, etc., practicing pranayama or breathwork helps control the “monkey mind”. Like a monkey, our mind keeps “jumping” here and there and can't seem to keep still. These are the fluctuating tendencies of our mind and we need to get control of them. With regular practice, we can control the fluctuating mind, attain stillness and develop one pointedness to gain access to the deeper realms of the mind and consciousness.

### Meditation & Mantra Chanting

Meditation and mantra chanting are done after pranayama. Garbha Sanskar enhances the bond between parent and baby. Music and meditation sessions are brain food for the developing fetus. Mantra chanting carry positive vibrations to the baby as little implants of *sanskars* (values and qualities) that we discussed in the previous article. Introducing such vibrations bring clarity, harmony, peace and tranquility in the minds of both baby and mother.

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