Clinical Question
Does prenatal yoga reduce labor pain?

Evidence-Based Answer
Participation in a prenatal yoga program may help reduce labor pain, but reported effects vary from modest to moderate. (Strength of Recommendation: B; based on two moderate-quality randomized controlled trials [RCTs].

Evidence Summary
A 2008 RCT (n = 74) evaluated the effects of a prenatal yoga program on labor pain vs. usual care among Thai primigravida women 18 years and older who were receiving regular antenatal care. Participants had no prior experience with yoga. Women with high-risk complications were excluded. The intervention included six one-hour yoga sessions between 26 and 37 weeks’ gestation. Sessions included basic pregnancy education, yoga asana, chanting, breath awareness, meditation, and a guided deep relaxation. Participants were asked to practice at home at least three times per week. Patient-reported labor pain was measured on a 100-point visual analog scale, and investigator-observed pain behaviors during labor were collected using a pain behavioral observation scale with scores ranging from 5 to 15 (lower scores indicate more perceived pain). Investigators collected data at three two-hour intervals after the onset of active labor. The yoga group had slightly lower pain scores (mean differences of 6.1, 4.7, and 4.6) and slightly lower pain behavior scores. There was no significant difference in use of analgesics between groups. There were no reported harms. The study was limited by lack of blinding, small sample size, unexplained attrition, narrow study population, unclear adherence to home practice, and lack of external validity of scores.

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References

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This series is coordinated by John E. Delzell Jr., MD, MSPH, Associate Medical Editor.

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