

Postpartum Progressive Asana Sequence

The following is a sample sequence for a full movement class you might offer a postpartum client (provided she has been cleared for physical activity). The over-arching theme of the sequence is Stability-Mobility-Awareness—much like the rest of this text! As always, tailor the following suggestions to the woman in front of you. Use inquiry throughout to direct your client's attention to her felt experience. And, create the space for her to discover her capacity for both strength and ease.

Warm up

Supine Pelvic Tuck & Tilt: 5 Guided, 5 On Own

Pelvic Reset

Supine Twisting Breathing: (5 rounds, side to side)

Child's Pose with Side Body Breathing: 3 Rounds

Core Body Extension Part A

Stage 1: Three-Legged Tabletop

Stage 2: One Legged Plank

Cobra Breathing: 5-10 Rounds

Core Body Extension Part B

Stage 1: Side Plank Modified/ Sunbird Flow; 2-4 Rounds

Stage 2: Forearm Plank to Sphinx Flow; 2-5 Rounds

Sphinx Breathing: 7-10 Breaths

Standing Series

Tadasana (Stable Mountain Pose): 5-10 Breaths

Swan Dive Breathing: 3-5 Rounds

Take Up Space Asana

Side Body Stretch: 3 Rounds

Standing Open Heart/ Protected Heart: 5 Rounds

Forward Fold with Bind: 5-7 Breaths

Standing Pelvic Tilt and Tuck

Chair Pose: 5-10 Breaths

Stage 2: Chair to Lunge Balance; 3 Rounds, Each Side

Standing/ Squat Breathing with Twist: 10 Rounds

Downward Facing Dog: 5 to 10 Breaths

Bridge Breathing: 5 to 10 Rounds

Meditative Bicycle: 5 to 10 Rounds

Restorative Options

Constructive Rest

Restorative Bridge Pose

Restorative Fish Pose

Final Resting Pose

Warm Up

Supine Pelvic Tuck & Tilt: 5 Guided, 5 On Own

Direction:

- Lie flat on mat. Bend knees and plant feet so that they lie flat on the mat, roughly under knees.
- Breathe in.
- Exhale, press lower back to the mat, pulling belly button toward the mat. Back should feel flush with mat.
- Inhale, begin to arch back as hips rock forward. Belly button will press skyward. Feel just your sacrum and below making contact with mat. Let ribs and belly expand.
- Repeat, letting movement align with breath, and breath with movement.

Focus:

- Notice feeling of expansion across belly and ribs.
- Notice any movement in the head, neck, and jaw.
- Pay attention to ease of movement, and work to find fluidity, without judgement of “what is.”

Transition: Let legs extend long. Find five deep breaths in savasana. Hug knees toward chest center when finished, and rock side to side.

Pelvic Reset

Direction:

- Lay on back with knees bent.
- Place a strap or belt around knees, and push knees outward, against the belt, as hard as possible for 6 seconds.
- Relax and repeat 3 times.
- After removing the strap, put a pillow or ball between legs and push in as hard as possible for 6 seconds.
- Relax and repeat 3 times.

Focus:

- Notice thoughts/ feelings that arise during this exercise. Take notice of them. Label them and let them pass. Return to the breath.

Supine Twisting Breathing: (5 rounds, side to side)

Direction:

- Begin with knees hugging to chest center. Inhale.
- On exhale, let knees fall rightward, pause a moment.

- On inhale, either with hands, or core strength, press/pull knees back toward centerline.
- On exhale, let knees fall leftward, pause a moment.
- On inhale, again, assisted by hands, or engagement of core, press/pull knees back toward chest center.
- Take 4 more complete rounds.
- During final round, let knees remain released to each side for a few deep breaths.

Focus:

- Notice breath like a stretch from the inside out.
- Notice stability and strength of movement.

Transition: Roll to one side, and move into child's pose, pressing seat toward heels, and extending hands forward. Use block or blanket beneath forehead, if useful.

Child's Pose with Side Body Breathing: 3 Rounds

Direction:

- In Child's Pose, extend hands forward, pressing palms gently to mat to activate arms and shoulders. Shoulders remain soft, releasing down back body.
- Breath in.
- On exhale, reach/ walk both hands toward outside edge of right side of mat, pressing left heel toward left hip. Try tenting hands, pressing fingertips; or, press palms flat and spread fingers.
- Inhale to return to centerline.
- Exhale, reach/ walk both hands leftward.
- Inhale centerline.
- Repeat.

Focus:

- Notice side body stretch.
- Notice breath like a stretch from the inside out.
- Notice expansion of whole chest and back body within breath.
- Notice release available with each out breath.

Transition: Press to tabletop, with shoulders aligned over wrists, and hips over knees.

Core Body Extension Part A

<i>Stage 1: Three-Legged Tabletop</i>	<i>Stage 2: One-Legged Plank</i>
<p><i>Direction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In tabletop, press right foot back, long, strong, and straight. For first three breaths, maintain contact of toes with mat. • Look for a stretch across whole back right leg. • Next, lift right leg, pressing actively through sole of left foot. • Breathe deeply for 3-5 rounds. • Ground through pressing palms, feel body lift away from mat and core engage. • Lower on exhale. • Repeat with left side. <p><i>Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice stability of posture. • Notice grounding, as well as rising. • Notice how core body must engage to help you rise with grace. 	<p><i>Direction:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From tabletop, press both legs straight and come into Plank Pose. • Press through palms. • Reach through crown of head. • Press through heels. • One strong line from crown of head through soles of feet. • Breathe in. Exhale lift right leg to hips height. • Breathe deeply, maintaining integrity of posture, for 3-5 deep breaths. • Exhale, release. • Repeat with left side.
<p><i>Transition: Lower down to mat, whole body prone. Notice breathing as expanding belly presses toward mat. Notice feeling of being held by mat.</i></p>	

Cobra Breathing: 5-10 Rounds

*Motherhood is largely a balance between
a strong core body, and a protected heart.
We practice finding it here.*

Direction:

- Inhale to rise, sliding hands to press beneath shoulders. Elbows want to hug gently toward ribs, while shoulders release down back body. Chest reaches forward. Soften jaw, neck, forehead, and ears.
- Exhale to lower. Inhale to rise. Exhale to lower.
- Take any organic movement within the structure of this shape that calls to you.

Focus:

- Inhale, notice expansion, openness, capacity to receive. Exhale, notice capacity to release.

Transition: Press back toward child's pose. Notice breath. Inhale to rise to tabletop.

Core Body Extension Part B

Stage 1: Side Plank Modified/ Sunbird Flow; 2-4 Rounds

Direction:

- From tabletop, take deep breath in.
- Exhale, press right hand to mat, and pour weight of body into right hand, and right knee, pressing left leg long and making contact with whole sole of left foot.
- Take deep breath in, finding length across whole left side body as left hand reaches forward over left ear, and left foot grounds to mat.
- Exhale, roll through centerline, drop left hand to mat and reach right hand forward. Press left foot backward. Right knee and left-hand ground toward mat and extend through limbs.
- Pay attention to joints. Engage arm and leg in shoulder and hip joint while still extending limbs away from body.
- Take deep breath in.
- Exhale, pour weight of body onto left side, grounding left knee, and pressing right leg long making contact with whole sole of foot to mat.
- Breathe in, extending right side body long.
- Exhale, and roll back toward centerline, grounding right hand and reaching left hand forward as left knee stays grounded.
- Inhale, and begin to flow once again.
- Finish at centerline in tabletop, and melt to child's pose.

Focus:

- Notice fluidity of movement.
- Notice stability of movement.
- Notice quality of grounded-ness, complimented by extension and lifting.

Sphinx Breathing: 7-10 Breaths

Direction:

- Find sphinx: With elbows beneath shoulders, press palms and forearms to mat.
- Ground through forearms. Root downward to rise upward.
- Reach heart forward as shoulders roll down back body. Breathe in.

- On exhale, let shoulder blades press toward each other. Let head grow heavy, forehead releasing toward mat.
- Notice ease.
- On inhale, return to sphinx. Notice strength.
- On exhale, find sukha (ease-full) sphinx.
- Move between poses, linking breath. Repeat for 7-10 rounds, or until body asks for stillness.

Focus:

- Notice space “in between.” Notice relationship between poses.
- Notice space in between breaths. Notice transition between breaths.
- Notice sensation. Breathe.

Stage 2: Forearm Plank to Sphinx Flow; 2-5 Rounds

Finding Shape: Forearm Plank

Direction:

- From tabletop, move through to top of push up pose. Lower forearms to mat.
- Shoulders stack over elbows. Find a strong 90-degree angle. Stack bones.
- To soften challenge, drop knees to mat finding a straight line between knees and crown of head.
- Ground through base points. Hold 5 breaths, or until you lose the integrity of the pose, i.e., your hips begin to sink or lift so the body loses alignment.

Focus:

- Draw attention to the long strong line of energy between crown of head and soles of feet.
- When you come into the forearm plank pose, consciously imagine a hand at the middle of back. Knit ribs together to touch, pull your belly button toward your spine. Engage glutes.
- Reach the crown of the head forward and press through soles of feet.
- Drag the palms and forearms toward the toes, dragging the toes toward the forearms—this movement is more intentional than actionable, as base points will stay in place, but the conscious intention to move the body in this way will begin to sew together the midline.

Finding Shape: Sphinx

Direction:

- From forearm plank, let hips lower down. maintain 90-degree angle in arms.
- Drag palms toward the elbow, elbows toward hips, as heart reaches forward.
- 5 long, deep breaths.
- Press to rise, returning to Forearm Plank.

Finding Flow:

- Mindfully repeat the movement between these two shapes for 2-5 rounds.

Focus:

- Focus in this pose is on the sensation of heart opening after a moment of strengthening. Notice the sensations of the forearm plank still lingering in the body, as the body surrenders to gravity, as the body finds openness.
- Notice if jaw clenches. Actively release jaw.

As in Stage 1, Finish Stage 2 with Sphinx Breathing.

Transition: Press to child's pose, and from child's pose press to downward facing dog. Enjoy a few deep breaths taking whatever movements call to you. When ready, walk to forward fold. Slowly rise to standing.

Standing Postures

Tadasana: Stable Mountain Pose; 5-10 Breaths

*Like Motherhood,
this posture is an awesome yet subtle combination of grounding and rising.
We must patiently, steadily root to grow and blossom.*

Direction:

- Stand with feet roughly hips distance, let hands rest at sides, loosely and easily.
- Breathe freely and deeply.

Focus:

- Notice gentle sway that occurs when we stop “holding,” or forcing stillness. Let body enjoy gentle sway. Notice breathing like a stretch from the inside out.

Swan Dive Breathing: 3-5 Rounds

Direction:

- Inhale. Reach hands over head.
- Exhale, pausing a moment to feel feet rooting toward mat. Fingertips reach toward sky, but shoulders stay softly releasing.
- Inhale fully, feel expansion.

- On exhale, softly bend knees, hinge at hips and begin to forward fold, reaching hands to sides. Maintain a long spine, and soft bend in knees.
- If lower or middle back needs more care, bend knees deeply and walk hands down fronts of legs. Alternatively, a chair can be used to support posture, and rather than folding forward completely, you can modify with a half forward fold.
- Inhale, and rise to standing, rolling vertebrae by vertebrae with core engaged to protect lower back.
- Repeat 3-5 times.
- Finish standing upright, pause to notice feeling of breathing being.

Focus:

- Notice grounding, rooting stability through legs soles of feet, paired with rising, lifting, blossoming, celebrating of top half of body.

Take Up Space Asana

Motherhood demands our whole bodied presence.

Presence is without “shoulds,” or “have-tos.”

Presence invites us to take shape in a way that feels good, and beautiful.

Direction:

- From tadasana, simply begin to take up space in a way that serves body and mind.
- Some suggestions:
 - Take feet as wide as the mat, let toes turn slightly outward. Lift to balls of feet. Reach hands high and wide.
 - Be creative. Move organically in a way that feels good, and even beautiful.
 - When the body says “thank you, that was perfect,” stop and settle back into tadasana.

Side Body Stretch: 3 Rounds

Motherhood is a practice of coming back to the centerline, breath by breath.

In moments of imbalance, we practice balancing, cultivating a connection to grounded-ness, to core body strength that serves us when life throws us off kilter.

Direction:

- Inhale, reach hands over head.
- Exhale, right hand falls to right side as left hand reaches rightward.
- Actively press left foot to mat to maintain equanimity. Keep left shoulder soft and engaged in join.
- Inhale to center line.

- Exhale, left hand falls to left side as right hand reaches leftward. Press right foot to mat, and keep right shoulder soft and engaged.
- Inhale rise to center.
- Exhale, begin again.
- Repeat 3 rounds. On final round to each side, enjoy a few extra breaths in the stretch.
- Return to tadasana. Notice feeling of breathing body here, now.

Focus:

- Notice grounding, particularly in foot on side that is being stretched. Notice tendency reach “out of joint.” If it’s happening on the mat, it’s probably happening off the mat.

Standing Open Heart, Protected Heart: 5 Rounds

Direction:

- In tadasana, interlace hands at sacrum.
- Take deep breath in, strong arms roll shoulders back, away from ears. Heart reaches up and forward. Head drops back to the degree that feels comfortable. Shoulder blades press toward each other, and melt down back body.
- On exhale, let back body broaden as head drops forward, neck softens. Chin melts chestward. Stretch across back of neck as head grows heavy. Arms slacken, soften.
- Repeat, linking breath with movement.

Focus:

- Notice feeling of open heart. Notice feeling of protected heart. Notice own capacity to open, and to protect. Affirm own agency in process.

Forward Fold with Bind: 5-7 Breaths

Direction:

- In tadasana, interlace hands at sacrum. Take deep breath in.
- On exhale, maintaining bind to the degree that feels right, forward fold with deep bend in knees.
- Experiment with hands and arms. Should bind be loose, or more tightly clasped? Should elbows bend gently, or deeply?
- Release jaw, back of neck. Let head hang heavy. Breathe deeply.
- To modify posture, release bind and clasp opposite elbows.

Transition: Release bind and roll vertebrae by vertebrae up to standing.

Standing Pelvic Tilt and Tuck	
<i>Stage 1: Legs straight</i>	<i>Stage 2: Knees bent</i>
<p>Direction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand with feet hips distance, gentle bend in knees. Hands might rest on hips. • On inhale, let pelvis tilt forward. Belly will expand, as belly button begins to press forward. • You will feel the arch in your lower back increase. Be gentle. • On exhale, begin to tuck pelvis by subtly engaging core body. Belly button will pull toward spine. • Feel lower back lengthen as tail bone tucks. 	<p>Direction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For stability, set up chair at top of mat, facing away from you. • Hold onto back edge of chair, and bend knees. Let the weight of your body rest in backward in your feet, rather than forward in your wrists and hands. • Begin Standing Pelvic Tilt and Tuck. <p><i>Stage 3: Elevated heels</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevate heels, and perform standing pelvic tilt and tuck with knees bent. • For additional challenge, remove hands from chair.

Transition: Press to standing if knees are bent. Step feet a little wider than mat, and turn toes outward. Let whole body soften into wide legged tadansa, noticing echoes of feeling of movement just performed.

Chair Pose: 5-10 Breaths

Motherhood challenges. Life challenges. The tenor of our life is not defined by those challenges, but in the quality of the response to challenge.

We practice consciously noticing our capacity to sustain ourselves in moments of discomfort. We practice knowing that challenge will pass.

The pose becomes an opportunity for the greater practices of ease, patience, compassion, and resilience.

Direction:

- From tadasana, take feet to either hips distance, or big toes touching with the heels slightly apart.

- Begin to bend knees.
- To start, let hands rest on hips.
- Start gently, and slowly increase the bend in the knees.
- Rock weight into heels and soles of feet.
- Hands might reach forward, or skyward; keep shoulders soft as they do.
- Find a place that is challenging, but useful.
- Breathe deeply.

Variation: Half Chair Pose

- Bend knees deeply so that knees and hips align.
- Let chest come to rest just above thighs.
- Reach hands forward, or behind you like wings of a jet airplane.

Variation: Chair Pose with Raised Heels

- From either full, or half chair pose, lift heels off mat.

Focus:

- Notice grounding body. Notice rising body.
- Notice capacity to be challenged in a safe way.
- Notice capacity to persist in moment of challenge without reacting.
- Notice capacity to choose to come into a place of ease-full-ness, both in mind and body.

Stage 2: Chair to Lunge Balance; 3 Rounds, Each Side

Direction:

- From chair pose, shift weight into right foot.
- Begin to lift left foot off mat.
- Shift top body forward as you step left foot back into lunge, keeping right knee bending deeply.
 - Pause. Take full round of breath.
 - Slowly, return to chair pose, shifting weight into forward foot.
 - *You might pause to enjoy a momentary standing balance like warrior 3 posture during transition.*
- End with both feet planted, back in chair pose, knees deeply bent.
- Repeat on opposite side.
- Repeat for 2 more full rounds, linking breath with movement.

Focus:

- Notice grounding, notice balance challenge, notice balance.

- Notice transitions between.
- Notice challenge of balancing.

Transition: End chair to lunge balancing in tadasana. Pause to notice feeling of breathing body, here, now.

Standing/ Squat Breathing with Twist: 10 Rounds

Direction:

- From tadasana, step feet to as wide as mat, let toes drip over the edges.
- Take deep breath in and reach hands over head.
- As you exhale, release hands to press chest center in prayer, and bend knees and release tailbone downward, moving toward yogic squat; only go as far as feels right for your hips and knees.
 - Inhale to rise, returning to wide legged tadasana.
 - Get comfortable with this movement, lowering and rising for a few breath linking rounds.
 - *When comfortable, add twist:*
 - Inhale, reaching hands skyward.
 - Exhale, hands to prayer as you move into yogic squat.
 - Inhale to rise, and as you press to standing, exhale and twist to right side, reach both hands rightward; hands can reach freely, or interlace with index fingers pointing.
 - Inhale toward centerline, reaching hands high. Exhale to lower.
 - Inhale to rise, and exhale twist to left side. Again, hands can reach, or interlace and point toward twisting side.
 - Inhale rise, and repeat full movement.

Transition: From final squat, transition to Wide Legged Half Chair. Take feet as wide as mat, bend knees deeply, pressing seat back as hands reach forward. Breathe a few long, deep, easeful breaths. When legs ask you to stop, find an easy forward fold.

From Forward Fold, step back to Downward Facing Dog.

Downward Facing Dog: 5 to 10 Breaths

Direction:

- From tabletop, tuck toes, pull belly button to spine, engage core and begin to straighten legs.
- Press into inner hand, fingertips. Roll inner upper arm outward. Let shoulders melt down back away from ears.
- Life tail bone. Soften backs of legs. Heels never have to touch.

- Peddle feet if feels good.
- Stay in pose for one minute. When shoulders and wrists begin to fatigue, come down, rest. Repeat 3-5 times.

Focus:

- Notice space. Notice length. Notice feeling of grounding/ rooting and lifting/ easing.
- In particular, notice the appearance of seeming dualities of sensation in the body.

Transition: Lower to Tabletop, shift hips back and roll to one side. Release legs long in front of you, and roll to lying on your back.

COOL DOWN

Bridge Breathing; 5 to 10 Rounds

Direction:

- Bend knees, and plant soles of feet to mat roughly beneath knees.
- On inhale, press through soles of feet and lift hips skyward.
- On exhale, let hips release to mat.
- Begin to integrate Pelvic Tilt and Tuck.
- On next inhale, feel tailbone tuck as you lift hips.
- As you exhale, releasing hips toward mat, let hips tilt; tailbone will press as back gently arches.
- On inhale, tuck tail and let the action carry you toward bridge.
- Repeat, linking breath with movement.

Transition: Release to lying on mat. Notice feeling of breathing body, here, now.

Meditative Bicycle: 5 to 10 Rounds

Direction:

- Loosely interlace hands behind the head. Bend knees so that feet are roughly beneath knees.
- Breathe in.
- As you exhale, connect right elbow with left knee, pressing right leg long.
- Inhale, bring the body toward the centerline.
- Exhale, connect left elbow with right knee, pressing left leg long.
- Inhale, bring body back toward centerline.
- Repeat.

- Link breath with movement.
- Move gently, slowly, patiently.

Restorative Options:

Constructive Rest

Direction:

- Let legs come to rest atop a chair so that knees are bent at a 90 degree angle.
- Let lower back soften matward.
- Soften everything that doesn't need to be tense.
- Practice 3 part breath:
- Breathe into belly. Pause.
- Breathe into ribs. Pause.
- Breathe into upper chest. Pause.
- Release breath slowly. Repeat.

Focus:

- Return to the breath.
- Notice deep, full, inhalations and exhalations.

Restorative Bridge Pose

Direction:

- Fold a blanket into a compact square, or stack several pillows; if you have a yoga block, use the block.
- Lift the hips, and slide bolster or block underneath hips, right at sacral point. Adjust until comfortable.
- Find a comfortable height upon which you can rest, fully; let the back enjoy a “stretch,” but make sure you are not straining. Remember—this practice is to serve you, fully. There are no “shoulds,” and no “have-tos.”
- See if you can let the hips become fully level here; seek balance.
- Practice 3 part breath:
- Breathe into belly. Pause.
- Breathe into ribs. Pause.
- Breathe into upper chest. Pause.
- Release breath slowly. Repeat.

Focus:

- Notice the space where the block or bolster is pressing into the lower back. Notice sensation. Let the mind particularly rest on the area where the pain and discomfort from bursitis presents. Notice the feeling. Let the mind describe the sensation.
- Notice what colors, textures, and images arise.
- Watch the colors, textures, and sensations change.
- When the mind wanders, simply bring it back, without judgment.

Restorative Fish Pose

Direction:

- Roll a blanket so that it becomes a compact, firm bolster. Place it horizontally along mat, about ¼ way down from the top. Lie back along mat and bolster, letting bolster come to comfortably rest on or around lower shoulder blades.
- Place a block or pillow beneath the head. Invite ease to the neck.
- Practice 3 part breath:
- Breathe into belly. Pause.
- Breathe into ribs. Pause.
- Breathe into upper chest. Pause.
- Release breath slowly. Repeat.

Focus:

1. Notice what shifts, what changes. Notice where breath feels “stuck.” See if you can soften into “stuck” areas, rather than wanting them to be different.

Final Resting Pose

Direction:

1. Move props away from backside of body. Let feet fall away, palms turn upwards.
2. Let breath return to natural rate.
3. Notice the feeling of being here, now.