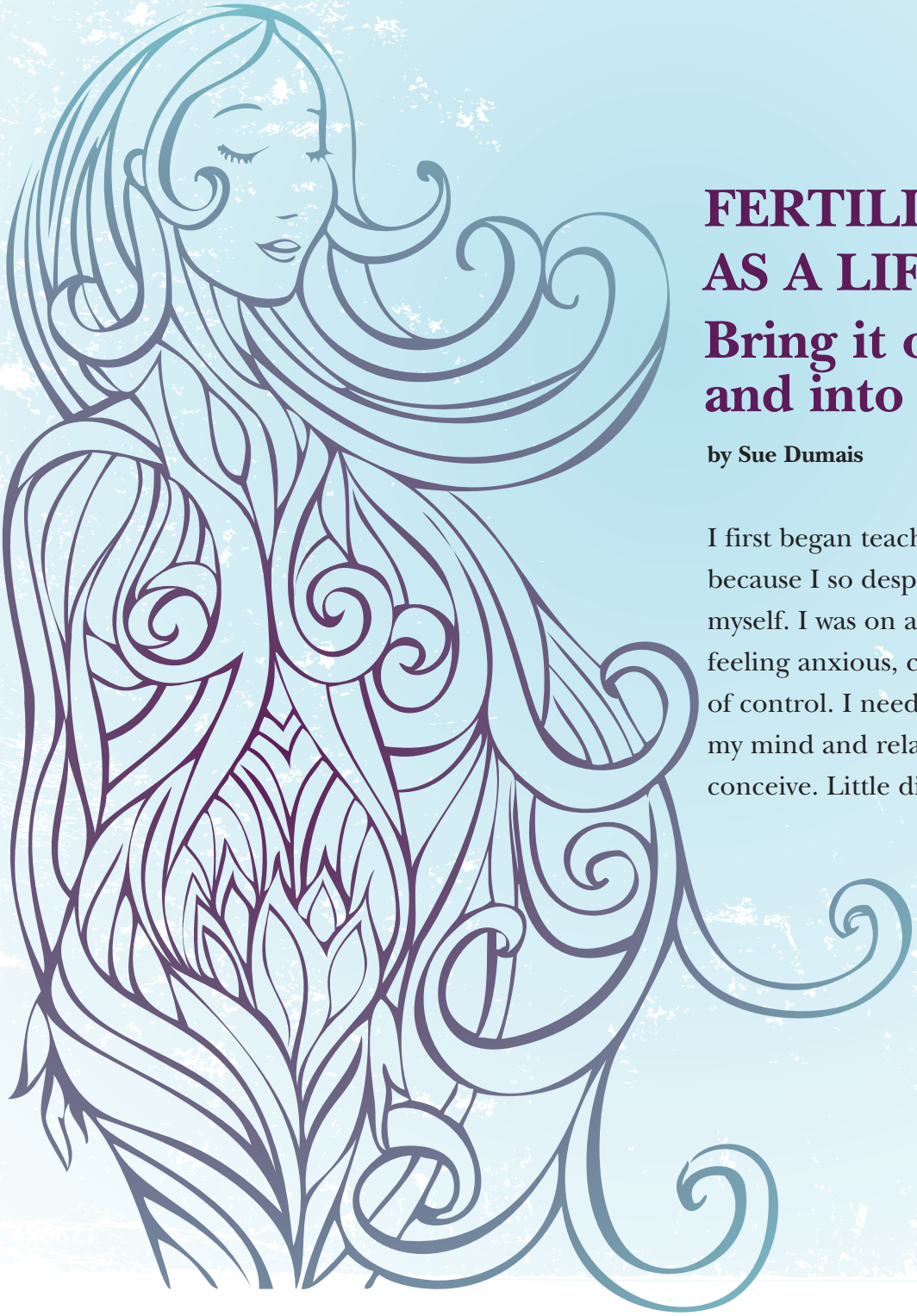


FERTILITY YOGA AS A LIFE PRACTICE

Bring it off the mat and into your life

by Sue Dumais

I first began teaching Fertility Yoga classes because I so desperately needed yoga myself. I was on an emotional roller coaster, feeling anxious, confused and spiralling out of control. I needed to find a way to calm my mind and relax my body so that I could conceive. Little did I know that my Fertility Yoga practice would improve every area of my life, not just my reproductive health.

It is no secret that dealing with fertility challenges can create a great deal of stress in every area of your life, including your relationship, career, health, social interactions and friendships. The worry and negative thoughts can quickly take over and become all consuming. My intention in writing this article is to give you some tools to use on or off the mat so you can receive the benefits of a regular Fertility Yoga practice no matter where you are.

Yoga originated in India more than 5000 years ago. Although yoga is an ancient practice, modern science is discovering its power to reduce stress and increase well-being. More and more people are turning to yoga to help reduce physical pain, increase flexibility, reduce stress and anxiety, and even to enhance fertility. I have had many clients tell me their doctors actually suggested they try yoga to help them deal with their stress. I have witnessed countless women enter the class feeling anxious and defeated and leave afterwards feeling more calm, with a deeper sense of confidence to help them with life's challenges. A Fertility Yoga class is also a place for women to come out of isolation and into a community of support. A fertility yoga class becomes a place to realize they are not alone and to connect with other women who are experiencing similar emotions and challenges.

I have heard the term "bringing your yoga practice off the mat" many times. In the last four years, I really began to look at my yoga practice as a way of life. Since I began living my yoga, I am better able to handle stressful situations by responding instead of reacting. I am more calm, grounded and at peace with my life. When challenges arise I see them as opportunities to heal a deeper part of myself. I no longer let fear dictate my life and I respond with love and compassion for myself and others. Yoga changes people's lives in ways they can't even begin to imagine. It is much more than a physical practice; it is a way of living that brings about peace, calm and awareness. You may be asking how a simple yoga practice can make such a difference in someone's life. Yoga is so much more than simply holding poses, breathing and meditation. I am going to show you how to create your own Fertility Yoga Life Practice.

Let's begin with your breath. Your breath is a very powerful tool and one that you can use anywhere in any circumstance. Simply focusing on taking deeper breaths can slow your thoughts, calm your mind and reduce stress. Chances are if you are feeling anxious or fearful your breath will become shallow and perhaps you may even find yourself holding your breath. Many people breathe very shallowly all the time as a habit or because of increased tension in the abdomen, torso and back muscles.

Breath Awareness Exercise:

Start by observing your breath.

Notice each inhalation and exhalation.

Resist the need to change the breath, simply observe.

Bring your awareness to the length of your inhalation compared to the length of your exhalation.

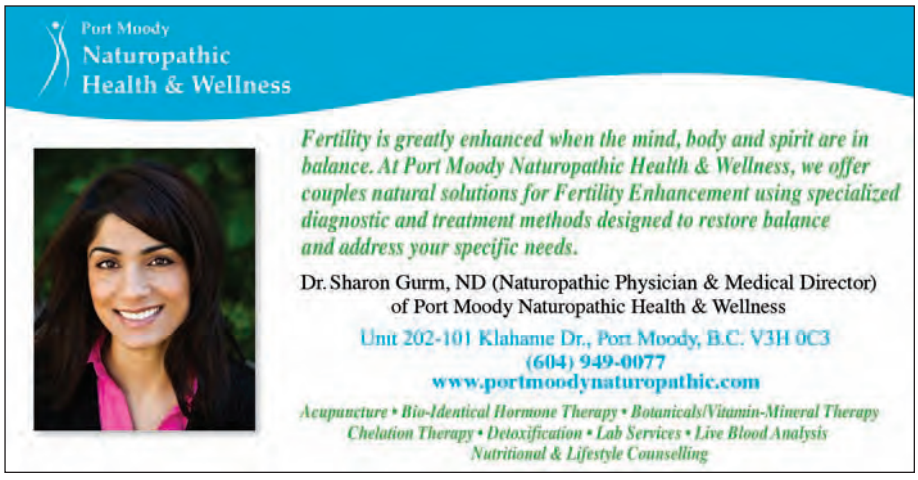
Shift your awareness to areas of your lungs and ribs where the breath feels restricted.

Remember to make no judgment, simply observe. We are creating awareness first.

Now shift your awareness to the areas of your lungs and ribs where the breath reaches easily with little or no effort. What is different about these areas that allow the breath?

Now take a longer exhalation and invite a deeper inhalation. On your next exhale let the breath fall out of your mouth with a sigh or "aaahhhhhhh" sound.

Your breath is your link to the present moment. It brings you away from your thoughts of worry and anxiety about the past or future and focuses them on what is happening here and now. If you are feeling anxious while waiting for results or notice yourself worrying about something you have no control over, your breath can bring you back to the present moment and help calm you. In fact the practice of deep breathing in and out of your nose can stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and relaxation response) and turn off the sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight stress response).



Beginning your Life Practice

Here are some ideas on how to bring or create your own yoga practice in your everyday life. Choose one that resonates with you. You need to take these tools into practice to see the benefits.

Tree Pose

Balance on one leg (optional) and imagine the foot you are standing on reaching deep down into the earth and branching out like the roots of a tree. Draw some of the nutrients from the earth up into your body and send negative energy down and out your roots. Imagine your leaves changing colours and falling from your branches. Each leaf represents a worry and as it falls to the earth you can simply let it go.

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Mountain Pose

Stand tall in your body and feel your feet in contact with the floor. Imagine your feet firmly planted into the earth. Imagine your feet are the heaviest part of your body and the head is the lightest. Connect to your inner strength and trust that you can deal with whatever comes your way today.

Finding a Balance

Stand tall with your weight evenly distributed between both feet. Bring your awareness to the subtle movements in your body. Be curious about how your body constantly renegotiates your balance through minor shifts and adjustments. Imagine having a balance in your life. What would that look like? How would you feel?

Bubble of Protection

Bring your awareness to your breath. Imagine a bubble of protection surrounding you on all sides. This invisible bubble will act like a filter. Through it you can invite in the positive and repel any negative energy you encounter throughout your day.

Observe your Thoughts

Creating awareness of your thoughts is so important. If you aren't aware of something it is difficult to change. Awareness is the key to transformation. Begin by observing your thoughts as if you were watching a movie. There is no need to shift or change them, simply begin by noticing and creating awareness. Are your thoughts positive or negative? What is the speed of your thoughts? Do you see space between your thoughts? Practice awareness and invite the idea of acceptance. Notice your thoughts, be aware and make peace with what you are noticing. "My thoughts are negative and very busy and it's ok".

Letting go of Negative Thoughts

As you become aware of any anxiety or negative thoughts imagine you could simply exhale them through your mouth, releasing them into the sky. Be willing to let go completely and invite some positive energy in on each inhalation. Exhale the negative, inhale the positive.

Shake it Off

This is one of my favourites that I use on a weekly basis at the end of my day. You can imagine yourself shaking it off and letting go of any negativity or you can actually lie down on your back with your arms and legs in the air and physically "shake it off." This exercise helps increase energy and blood flow and is a great way to release negative thoughts and energy.

Water off a Duck's Back

When you receive negative comments or advice you can simply imagine them falling away like water off a duck's back. Set the intention that you only invite positive energy. Do not let others' negativity into your body or into your life. Let their opinions simply wash away.

Q-Tip

Q-tip stands for "quit taking it personally." Others' opinions and advice about your fertility can sometimes feel hurtful. Remember that most people mean well and unless they have had a personal experience with fertility they just don't get it. Many people don't know how to respond or what to say to you so they end up saying things that are inappropriate. Don't take it personally.

If you have an opportunity to practice the child's pose as a physical posture it is very calming. During the posture I often encourage clients to explore their relationship with the Self. I encourage them to create awareness and reflect on their inner dialogue throughout their day. How do you talk to yourself? Are your thoughts toward your Self kind and compassionate or are your thoughts judgmental and cruel? How would you label your relationship with your Self? Are you best friends, strangers, enemies? To what extent can you begin to be your own best friend?

Body Awareness

It is easy to judge your body for not supporting you or "not working." It is common to feel betrayed by your body when facing fertility challenges. I encourage my clients to shift their awareness away from what isn't working and towards what is working and how your body is responding. Notice how your body feels each day as you move through your day. Focus on the positive aspects. How is your body supporting you? What feels good? What can you do to help your body become healthier? Practice Present Moment Awareness Fertility Yoga as an opportunity to find stillness and become aware of the present moment. Worried thoughts about the future and regrets for the past take you away from your life. This type of thinking brings you into a world of illusion. The gift of the present moment is where you will find clarity, focus and guidance as you tap into your own intuition. It is in this very moment that you will find the answers you seek and your path will reveal itself. Take a deep breath and remind yourself that life is occurring now!

Practice Gratitude

Find three things you are grateful for each day. Invite the feeling of gratitude into your heart and feel the warmth it creates within. When you begin to focus on what you feel grateful for you will begin to notice more things you are thankful for. Gratitude lightens your heart and lifts your spirit.

Open Your Heart

Imagine that you have never been hurt before and that you can love with your whole heart. Open your heart to give love as well as to receive love from your Self and others. Practice this one in relationships that feel safe rather than using it to create new relationships. I encourage you to focus on your desire to be a Mother and connect with the place within you that knows you can be a Mother. Begin to connect with your baby to be. Your heart is the first womb. Invite your baby into your heart and into your life as you surround them with love.

Begin Now. You Can Do It!

There is no better time than this very moment to begin creating your new Fertility Yoga Life Practice. As you practice each day you will see your life transform. Every obstacle becomes an opportunity to heal. Every challenge becomes an opportunity to practice what you read here. Remember to be kind and gentle with your Self. Become your own best friend. Speak to your Self the same way you would speak to your future child. Begin to Mother and care for your Self each and every day. You are a powerful creator and everyday you create your reality. This is your life! You have the ability to transform your experience of fertility and create a life worth living! Begin now!

About the author

Sue Dumais is the founder of Family Passages Mind Body Studio in Vancouver, British Columbia. She is the author of "A Strong Core for Life," and "Yoga for Fertility Handbook." Sue has developed a Fitness Fertility Specialist Certification and Yoga for Fertility Teacher Training Course. Sue's Yoga for Fertility Classes, Private Yoga Therapy Sessions and "Transforming Your Fertility", a couples' mind body program, have been instrumental in transforming the fertility experiences of countless women and couples. To learn more visit **www.familypassages.ca** or call **604-266-6470**.

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