

Bellydance: An Ancient Birth Ritual for Modern Times

Bellydance today is becoming increasingly popular among women everywhere for its physical and mental benefits, but did you know that thousands of years ago bellydance was a fertility rite? These birth rituals served dual purpose: physical aid and spiritual expression. Picture this: a group of women consisting of your closest family and friends surrounding you at your birth, encircling you with love, song and dance. All of your sisters move their bodies in unison with you and your labor, contracting their bellies, breathing, moving the circle and singing. As you are supported by this powerful concentration of energy, your baby enters the world in celebration. The singing and dancing will continue for hours in honor of woman and the womb ~ the center of all creation.

Pregnancy is the perfect time to discover bellydance, a dance by women for women. The abdominal and hip focus makes bellydance an excellent preparation for birth. It will tone and strengthen the body, specifically the muscle groups used in childbirth such as the abs, back, gluts, legs, pelvic floor and birth canal. Pre-natal bellydance creates a strong connection with your baby. It uses gentler moves such as soft, swaying hip circles and figure 8's, rib circles and belly undulations. Acknowledging the womb as the baby's first cradle, you can calm your baby using the soothing back and forth movement of a hip sway or the gentle belly roll.

These moves will help reduce pressure and tension in the body. Practicing these moves will help you gain an awareness of the muscles involved in birth and you will learn to trust your body. This can help you have a shorter, less painful birthing experience as well as assist in post pregnancy recovery. There are also many moves that can be learned during pregnancy to be used on the big day! Moves like hip shimmy, pelvic tilt and internal hip circles will help to support, stimulate and expel during birth.

As with any exercise program, you should always consult with your health care professional before beginning. Even if you are physically limited, you can perform some moves lying down in practice or birth.

Beyond the physical benefits, bellydance can give you a terrific mental boost. It clears the mind, enhances your mood, energy level and self-image. Practicing bellydance helps alleviate the possibility of depression or anxiety ~ both common among new mommies. Bellydance lets you embrace your body, your sexuality, your womb and life! Awaken your inner goddess and learn the language connected to the feminine consciousness. The physical, mental and spiritual benefits for you and your baby make belly dance something well worth checking out.

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