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LET'S DANCE

Shake it, MAMA!

These belly-dancing moves will help you tune into your body and prepare for an easier birth...

Handy tip, who loves a boogie around the living room? Dancing boosts your happy hormones, improves your fitness and, best of all, it's fun! But there's one dancing style in particular that can help you have an easier pregnancy and labour: belly dancing. 'There's a long tradition of women belly dancing throughout their pregnancies in the Middle East,' says Dancing for Birth teacher, Tessa Venuti Sanderson. 'It helps strengthen the key muscles in your body that are specifically used in pregnancy and birth, such as your abdominals, lower back, hip and pelvic floor muscles, and it also allows you to tune into your body and discover comfortable ways to move. Women also use belly dancing during labour: a woman would call for the female friends and family members she wanted to support her, and they would form a circle around her, simulating their bodies and creating



MEET THE EXPERT

Tessa Venuti Sanderson is a Dancing for Birth teacher (dancingforbirth.com), belly dancer, pregnancy yoga instructor, founder of tessayoga.co.uk, and a mum of two

wave-like movements that mimic a contraction.' So, grab a hip scarf and let's get wiggling!

Ease pelvic tension

HIP ARC

Strengthening your hip and pelvic muscles can help prevent or reduce pelvic discomfort. A hip arc activates the muscles in your pelvic region and tension. Stand in belly-dance posture (below) and begin to slowly twist your body, moving each shoulder backward and forward. Now step forward with your right foot and repeat the hip-twisting exercise with your left foot. You should feel your hip feels like it's making an arc back to return to your starting position, then repeat with your left hip.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN DANCING...

Before you perform any move, get into the correct belly-dance posture. It's vital that you're in this position before you start every move, as it will protect your lower back and help to support those important pelvic muscles.

To begin, stand with your knees slightly bent, chest lifted and your shoulders back and down. Activate the muscles in your pelvic floor by clenching around your vagina and bottom, and pulling your tummy button in towards your

spine, so the bottom of your back feels like it's snuggly tucked in. Then either sit on your heels or rest your feet on your hips, bringing your feet out to the sides with your knees bent. Inhale, which creates a space for you.

Throughout each move, take slow, deep breaths in and out.

Protect against back pain

HIP CIRCLE

Your growing bump can put pressure on your lower back muscles right from your first trimester, leading to tension, stiffness and an achy back. So, help keep these muscles supple and knock out any knots by performing some gentle hip circles. Hip circles are a great way to introduce your body to belly-dance movements and help you activate and build strength in the muscles in and around your lower back. Stand in belly-dance posture, then gently move your hips in a circular motion in one direction, and then in the other, as if you're trying to draw a little circle with the base of your spine.

BELLY SQUEEZE

Support your bump

This gentle movement activates your core muscles, and strengthens the trans-abdominal muscles that support your bump and help your body carry the weight of your baby. Put on some slow music with a steady beat, stand in belly-dance posture, and slide your right hand over your bump until it is resting underneath. Then gently squeeze your lower abdominal muscles, pulling your tummy in towards your belly button - your bump will draw back slightly from your hand. Hold for a couple of seconds, then gently release and repeat, so your bump moves backwards and forwards.



LET'S DANCE!

Add room to your womb!

HIP TILT

By the time you're in your third trimester, some of the positions your baby gets into can feel pretty uncomfortable for you, especially when he's pressing on your ribs or spine. And, as he grows bigger, it's not so easy for your baby to manoeuvre himself into a different position. Performing this hip tilt will create more room for your little wriggler. By tilting your pelvis, you're making it more elliptical in shape, freeing up space in your womb and encouraging your baby to stretch out. Stand in belly-dance posture and bend your knees, then straighten your left leg, so your left hip naturally rises and your right hip lowers. Then relax your left leg and gently bend it until you return to your starting position. Repeat on your right side, in a soft, continuous movement.

FIGURE-EIGHT MOVEMENT

Turn your baby

If you feel that your baby is pressing on your spine or in a back-to-back position, help encourage him to wriggle around into a position that's more comfy for you by swaying, circling and tilting your hips in what's known as a figure-eight movement. It works in a similar way to a hip tilt, as it creates space in your womb for your baby to move. But while tilting your hips gives your baby a fraction more space to uncurl his arm or tuck in his chin, the circular, looping motion of this figure-eight movement can give your baby enough room to turn. In a standing position, use your finger to draw a number eight in the air, parallel to the ground. This is the outline you'll be drawing with your hips. Then, in belly-dance posture, swing your left hip forwards, out and back in a circle, imagining you are curving it around the left loop of your number eight, before returning it to the centre point. Repeat on the right side, then continue as your hips are moving in a fluid, looping motion.



OMI PELVIC CIRCLES

Add power to your push

Performing very slow, rhythmic pelvic circles, called omi, can help to strengthen your vaginal muscles, which support the base of your womb and bladder, and can make pushing during labour easier.

Complete this move regularly in your third trimester in preparation for labour. Begin this move in the belly-dance posture, then push your right hip outwards. Now tighten your vaginal muscles - the easiest way to make sure you're using the right muscles is to imagine that you're tightly gripping a pencil with them. Now tuck in the base of your

spine as the spine of an imaginary horse, push forwards. Push your left hip out to the left, then relax your lower back so that your 'penis' is angled out behind you, pointing down towards the floor. Continue with this movement to create a tiny circle with your pelvis. Then repeat, making a circle in the opposite direction.

At 20 weeks and beyond, your baby can hear and enjoy music. Combined with the gentle rocking and internal massage that he'll experience while you're dancing, this is a lovely way to bond - he might just give you a little nudge to encourage you, too!

THE SHIMMY

Shorten labour

A full-body shimmy can shorten labour, as shaking your body in a loose, rhythmic way helps your baby shift into the right position for birth. Shimming works with gravity to move your baby down into your cervix, which encourages your womb to release the hormone prostaglandin. This causes your cervix to soften and stimulates contractions. Put on some music to help you find a rhythm. Then, in a standing position, move your left shoulder forward and your right shoulder back, then relax, and repeat this pattern while keeping the rest of your body still. Next, add a hip squarer: clench your right buttock and relax, then squeeze your left buttock and relax. Start doing these movements at twice the rate to the music, and then you've entered the shimmy territory to double time!

Ride a contraction

THE CAMEL

When you start having contractions, the muscles in your womb contract and release in a wave-like motion, to move your baby into position and push him through your birth canal. Mimicking this movement and creating a wave, or undulation, with your body while you're having a contraction can help you tune in and work with your body. Practise it now, then use in labour. From belly-dance posture, step forward with your right foot, lift your chest and lengthen and straighten your back. Gently lean back, pull your shoulder blades down, then pull in your pelvic floor and tuck under the base of your spine, like you're pulling your belly button in towards your spine. Bring your shoulders back to a neutral position, then lean slightly forward as you uncurl and release your pelvis and push your bottom backwards, before returning to standing. Repeat this as a continuous movement, so you feel as if you're creating a wave or ripple with your body.

Watch Tests perform these moves at mother and baby's aid / bump-belly dancing