

Yoga mama

Yoga does wonders for the mind and body and if anyone can benefit from that, it's frazzled new mums. By Kelly Baker.

WALK INTO DENBY Sheather's yoga class and you'll be immediately struck by one thought: this is no ordinary yoga gathering. For Denby's sunlit rooms ring not with the soft chimes of ancient bells or even gentle chanting, but with the laughter of adult women and the cooing of the babies they hold close.

Denby is one of a handful of yoga teachers who specialise in mother and baby classes. A long-time yoga practitioner and teacher, Denby began to explore pre- and post-natal yoga several years ago. The more she learned, the more she was convinced yoga and mothers are a perfect match, but it wasn't until her son Max was born that she fully grasped the depth of the partnership.

"After having Max I struggled with the everyday challenges of motherhood," she says. "I found it difficult physically, mentally and emotionally. But after six weeks I got back to my yoga and it helped me to find myself all over again. Having a baby changed me, and yoga helped me to deal with those changes."

But while Denby knew yoga made her a better mother, looking after Max meant she had little free time in which to practise. But then she came up with the perfect solution – she and Max would practise together. This went so well that Denby (who had also trained with Suzanne Swan, one of the leading mother and baby yoga teachers in Australia) launched her own

The bridge – Setu bandhasana



The half boat – Ardha navasana



Ki yoga – yoga of life

Denby Sheather's mother and baby yoga classes practise the Ki yoga style – a dynamic Japanese style, which changes with the seasons. To enquire about her classes, call 0413 747 644 or visit www.kiyoga.com.au.

Standing warrior II – Virabhadrasana



The half boat – Ardha navasana

You: Lie on your back with knees to chest. Place your baby on your shins, holding him around the waist. Position your legs at right angles and flex your feet to keep your baby secure. Keep your lower back pressed into the mat and legs squeezed together. Exhale and lift your torso so you can sit up and kiss or chat with your baby. Engage your pelvic floor muscles as you sit up and make sure you keep your neck and shoulders relaxed. Inhale, then lower to floor, relaxing pelvic muscles. Keep your legs squeezed and baby comfortable. Repeat six times slowly to build pelvic floor strength. When finished, draw knees to chest and bounce baby.

Tip: Keep your legs at right angles to work the belly correctly.

Baby: Jiggle your legs and bounce your baby – they love it.

Benefits: Strengthens mid-section of the body and tones pelvic girdle. Also helps improve digestion and boost sexual confidence.

Standing warrior II – Virabhadrasana

You: Stand with feet hip-width apart, hands at your sides. Exhale and take a big step forwards with your right leg. Turn your left foot 90 degrees out to the left. Position the right heel so it's in line with the arch of the left foot. As you exhale, bend your right knee to a right angle so your thigh is parallel to the floor and stretch your arms out in front and behind (unless holding baby – see below). Hold and breathe for five to six breaths. Inhale and return to your starting position. Repeat the same sequence using the left side.

Tip: Engage your pelvic floor muscles throughout the pose.

Baby: Baby sits on your front thigh, held close, facing outwards.
Benefits: Strengthens and stretches the legs, back, shoulders.