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Me time for moms-to-be

**POULOMI BANERJEE ATTENDS PRENATAL AND POSTNATAL CLASSES AND EMERGES WITH ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE OF PREGNANCY**



Prenatal and postnatal classes at Belle Vue Clinic.

Pictures by Bishwarup Dutta and Sanat Kr Sinha

It is the best feeling in the world — the feeling of yet-to-be born life stirring inside you. Or so I was told at Shabnam Agarwal Goswamy's prenatal classes at Belle Vue Clinic! Not having ever been pregnant, I couldn't hope to understand it in its fullness, and the closest I had been to such hardcore baby preparation before was watching Preity Zinta work out in *Salaam Namaste*.



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Day I

I am late. I run to the physiotherapy section at Belle Vue where I have been asked to go by Dr Shabnam Agarwal Goswamy, who conducts the session. I do not know why the attendant looks at me askance as I skid to a halt in front of her desk. I give my name and request to be taken to class. The attendant asks me to step in for my check-up. Check-up? I am confused, suspicious and scared, all at once. And then my jaw drops as comprehension dawns. "I am not pregnant," I tell her. Now, it is her turn to look surprised.

Finally in the classroom, there are about four or five women in the room with me, all in various stages of pregnancy. I see one, still in the initial throes of morning sickness, regularly sipping on a glass of water. Another has her feet up on a chair. As I slip in, the ladies turn to look at me — or rather, at my flat stomach. (I had refused to let Shabnam tie a towel around my abdomen to make me look pregnant, as she had threatened to do.)

**What I am told**

Shabnam is explaining the reproductive system, dwelling on the organs that are called into action during pregnancy and childbirth.

There are many hormonal changes in the body during this time to facilitate the process of giving birth.

 CIMA Gallery

The pelvic floor muscles need to be strong. Exercise. Tighten the pelvic floor muscle and hold it for 5 seconds and then release. Practise this 100 times a day in small instalments. Well-toned muscles will enhance your sex life after childbirth.

 USA Anandautsav

Walking is good.

### **What I do**

I pay only half my attention to Shabnam. I study the other women. They all look very calm. They do not look as though there are life-altering changes occurring to their bodies.

I try to do the pelvic floor exercises, but am not able to feel the muscles as I should.

### **What I learn**

That the fertilised egg attaches itself to the wall of the uterus. Wherever it gets attached, the placenta forms.

There are three trimesters and in each there are certain changes in the body. There is a need to urinate frequently.

Digestion is a problem because as the foetus grows, it pushes up the stomach.

Particular hormonal changes induce greater tissue extensibility. But this also makes the muscular skeletal tissues weak and vulnerable, so movement should be careful.

Day II

Is an extension of Day I, but there is more to do today, as Shabnam puts the moms-to-be (and me) through a series of exercises.

### **What I am told**

The first one is a stretch. Palms forward, arch the pelvis. This improves the blood supply to the pelvic area.

Then comes the pelvic floor muscle exercise.

There's another exercise where you sit in a semi-squat position, tilt the pelvis back and feel the muscles work.

The last part is a relaxation session. In the guided programme, the CD talks gently of pregnancy and labour as those in the class with me relax with a pillow.

### **What I do**

Exercise, or try to. Not being pregnant doesn't give me an edge. In fact, often the others do better than me.

Sit back and let my mind wander during the relaxation session. I cannot feel the things the voice in the CD wants me to, but I am nevertheless filled with a sense of well being.

### **What I learn**

That there are too many muscles in the body. Muscles that I did not even know existed were sore and aching after my many stretches.



## Day III

Is a preparation for labour, and the papas are there, too, to understand how they might help their wives once the pain starts.

### What I am told

Shabnam runs a video on the entire labour and birth process.

The tendency of most women, once the pain starts, is to concentrate all their energies on pushing the baby. Don't stop breathing. If the level of oxygen starts to drop, the doctors will have to resort to artificial breathing and that's an added complication.

It's better to have a normal delivery than a C-section. You should let your body decide; don't go in for a C-section because of the fear of pain, Shabnam advises.

### What I do

Am increasingly frightened by the image of a child's head pushing out of the woman on the video.

### What I learn

That the baby may belong to both parents, but delivery is still a woman's job. Many of the husbands don't bother to come. Others look disinterested in the proceedings.

## Day IV

I go in to find three women battling the post-pregnancy bulge. This is a postnatal class. I must have set some sort of record for the fastest transition from the pre- to postnatal stages!

### What I am told

The workout has to start off slowly after delivery because the body must not be made to work too hard. The attempt is to exercise each part of the body, both to increase fitness as well as to lose the flab.

Elastic bands and Swiss balls are used in a series of exercises to strengthen your arms, breasts, chest, legs and work on the abs.

### What I do

I am no good with the elastic band, but I am rather good with the leg exercises.

### What I learn

It's not easy to cut the flab. It's tough even without having gone through pregnancy. I have no strength in my arm muscles.

I have been through all the classes, well before my time. And though not adept at the exercises, I now know about the workings of the body and pregnancy. Postpartum fitness is about much more than looking good — it's about improving quality of life.

I hope that, with all I have learnt, when my time comes around, I can forgo the classes. But I think not. It is a lot to handle, even without the baby!

What job would you like to do for a day? Tell [t2@abpmail.com](mailto:t2@abpmail.com)

To



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