

## Dancing for that special delivery

By Kay Quinn

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It's not unusual for first-time moms, or even second- and third-time moms, to feel nervous during pregnancy, labor and delivery.

Thanks to classes called Dancing For Birth™, local women are finding prenatal and postpartum support and reassurance in an unusual way.

Dancing For Birth™ class teaches expectant moms belly dancing during a time in life when the expectation is that they'll slow down.

"I did fear pregnancy and everything that was going to happen," recalls Stephanie Baird, 38, a mother of two from Town and Country.

Baird began belly dancing at Dancing For Birth™ in the fifth month of her first pregnancy. Her daughter is now 4. Baird danced through her second pregnancy, and now takes 9-month-old Nolan to classes with her.

Her second delivery "was a very easy birth," Baird says.

Stephanie Larson founded Dancing for Birth™ when she moved to St. Louis from New Jersey in 2003. Participants pay \$15 per class to learn belly dancing, African, Latin and some interpretive dance.

"Sometimes women come because they've had a birth experience that they didn't enjoy and they're looking for ways to improve upon that the next time," said Larson, who is a certified doula, someone who accompanies women in labor for emotional, physical and informational support. Larson is also a child birth educator with a background in dance.

"Sometimes people come just for the fitness element," Larson said, "and what they walk away with is increased trust in their bodies and in the birth process, and new ideas for how to give birth in a more enjoyable and more effective way."

Liza Lara, 33, of St. Louis, says she started participating early in her pregnancy because she's always loved dance.

"You sort of assume you're going to be laid up a little bit or spending your nights on the couch during pregnancy," Lara said. "It's fun to get out and move your body in ways you don't normally move. It's also nice because Stephanie is calm and does some things in class to prepare you for the birth."

Most women who were active before they became pregnant can continue that activity during pregnancy, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. But be sure to check with your obstetrician about your appropriate activity level during pregnancy, and before beginning belly dancing, or any new activity.

Exercise during pregnancy can help keep you strong, flexible and help you control your weight.

But many of the moms who attend Dancing for Birth™ classes believe it also helps them in labor and delivery.

“By being active and moving their bodies in labor, they feel less discomfort, their births are more quick, they’re easier, the women feel more empowered,” said Larson.

For more on Dancing For Birth <sup>TM</sup>, including information on classes or becoming an instructor, call 1-866-643-4824, or visit [www.dancingforbirth.com](http://www.dancingforbirth.com).

For information on pregnancy from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, visit [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org).

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