

The Role of Aromatherapy in Maternity Care

Benefits of Aromatherapy in Pregnancy and Labour

- A tool for relaxation and relief of anxiety
- Aids physical discomforts experienced in pregnancy
- Aid to cope with pain in labour
- Thought to facilitate uterine action
- Aids transition to parenthood

Contraindications to the use of essential oils in pregnancy.

Anyone with pre-existing illness i.e. diabetes, epilepsy, raised blood pressure or cardiac condition.

Multiple pregnancies. History of quick labours. Abdominal pain not related to labour. Caution also be exercised where there is a history of miscarriage or heavy early bleeding.

Essential oils that can be used in pregnancy

It is advisable to limit the application of essential oils through massage and should not be carried out in the first 14/15 weeks of pregnancy.

Use through inhalation on a tissue or with a suitable essential oil diffuser. Those oils marked with an * are best used after the 16th week of pregnancy.

Grapefruit, lemon, orange, ginger, petitgrain – for the relief of nausea and vomiting.

Mandarin, bergamot, neroli and sandalwood – to calm anxiety

Lavender* and **eucalyptus** – the relief of headaches.

Mandarin, orange, petitgrain, sandalwood, roman chamomile ginger – may give relief from indigestion.

Mandarin, valerian, sandalwood, ylang ylang, lavender*, roman chamomile* - may help insomnia

Lavender*, neroli and mandarin: may help preventing stretch marks

Essential oils that can be used in Labour (after 37 weeks of pregnancy)

Lavender, clary sage, mandarin, roman chamomile are all essential oils that can aid pain relief in labour. Each works with the same aim but in different contexts and is as individual to each woman as is her own labour.

Lemon can be cooling as well as uplifting and it enhances the effect of other essential oils.

Peppermint is excellent for the relief of nausea in labour and is cooling.

Eucalyptus is cooling and helps with nasal congestion.

Frankincense is a useful aid when the going gets tough to help calm and slow down breathing – useful for asthmatic women.

Rose and Jasmine are at the top of the scale and are wonderful for women in an anxious state or one of depression as they are both very emotionally warming and also excellent pain relievers and relaxants.

Care should be taken when using **clary sage** or **jasmine** when labour is fast as they can quicken labour further. **Peppermint** and **clary sage** should not be used with women in pre-term labour or applied by pregnant midwives due to their effect they have on the pregnant uterus. Always consider any interaction between the essential oils that act on the uterus and conventional labour drugs.

Essential oils that can be used after the birth

Lavender is the commonest for use with sore, bruised perineum that may or may not require stitches.

Orange, Mandarin, neroli, bergamot, rose, jasmine – are good when met with postnatal blues or fatigue.

Geranium and **cypress** will help with haemorrhoids commonly known as piles.

Methods of application

In pregnancy it is commonly recommended to use a 1% blend (1 drop of essential oil to 5mls of carrier oil) this blend can be used until after the birth when it may be increased to 2%.

BATH: Essential oils added with a carrier oil to a warm bath, not to be used with soaps or other bubble baths and min soak of 15 mins. With this method 4 to 6 drops of oil can be added to the bath in pregnancy rising to 6 to 8 drops after birth.

FOOTBATH: used as above but only 2 to 3 drops in pregnancy, 3 to 4 drops after birth. Not recommended to use a foot spa in pregnancy.

MASSAGE: very gentle massage using carrier oil can have wonderful physical and mental effects.

SPRAY: A small plastic spray bottle can be a very useful tool in labour as it is hot work! Filled with warm water and add 2 to 3 drops of essential oils. It can then be shaken and sprayed to cool and refresh. Avoid eyes and mouth and use only on day of preparation.

INHALATION: This can be via a tissue or a stone/ electric burner or diffuser to give relief to symptoms of nausea or anxiety.

CREAMS/LOTIONS: These can be used during the pregnancy period for skin irritations and some minor ailments.

NOTE : These notes are aim to raise awareness of the effectiveness of pure essential oils and their role in contributing to maternity care. They are not designed to replace advice and treatment by a registered aromatherapy practitioner, midwife, consultant or GP.

When considering a treatment always consult a registered qualified aromatherapist.

To locate an IFA therapist visit www.ifaroma.org