



Aromatherapy in pregnancy

- Aromatherapy is the use of highly concentrated plant essential oils containing chemicals which have various effects on your body and your mood. Aromatherapy is often combined with massage, or the oils can be added to a bath. The oils are absorbed through the skin into the circulation and transported around your body. Oils can be used in a compress, cream or lotion, or given in vaginal pessaries or rectal suppositories. They are also inhaled into the lungs and transported round your body every time you smell them.
- *Don't* assume that, just because they are natural, aromatherapy oils are automatically safe: many should not be used during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding, or whilst you are trying to conceive or receiving treatment for infertility. Avoid using aromatherapy oils in the first 3 months of pregnancy, unless advised by an expert. Oils to avoid during pregnancy include clary sage, jasmine, rosemary, basil, sage, juniper berry, rose and nutmeg, but many others should be used with caution.
- If you have any major medical condition, are taking prescribed drugs or develop a pregnancy complication, check if it is safe to have aromatherapy treatment. If you have epilepsy or a major heart problem, you should never use aromatherapy oils. Use them with caution if you have asthma, kidney or thyroid conditions.
- During pregnancy, regular aromatherapy is relaxing and may relieve backache, constipation or oedema (swollen ankles).
- Safe oils for pregnancy include lavender, orange, bergamot, grapefruit, lime, neroli, ylang ylang, frankincense and black pepper. Use no more than 1 drop in a teaspoon of carrier oil such as grapeseed.



- In labour, check with your midwife before using aromatherapy to avoid complications or interactions with drugs. Your partner could massage your feet, shoulders, abdomen; use oils in a footbath, or make a compress to put on the small of your back. Use *no* more than 2 drops of essential oil to a teaspoon of grapeseed carrier oil. Lavender is good for pain relief, but don't use it with an epidural, as it lowers your blood pressure. Black pepper, bergamot, grapefruit, chamomile, neroli, rose and ylang ylang are relaxing and uplifting. Spearmint or peppermint ease nausea – put one drop on a tissue and inhale. Frankincense is excellent for panic, especially towards the end of the first stage: put one drop, neat, onto your palm and inhale the vapours.
- *Don't* add oils to the bath or birthing pool if your waters have broken, to avoid risks to your baby's eyes. *Don't* leave vaporisers / aroma-stones on longer than 10 - 15 min in each hour as it may cause nausea or headaches. You can't use vaporisers with a candle (naked flame) in the hospital, because of fire risks. Electrical vaporisers must be checked by the hospital electrician – so plan ahead if you are considering using one in labour.
- Clary sage can be useful for stimulating contractions if your labour slows down, and some midwives use it to induce labour if you are overdue. However, it is not safe for you to use clary sage at home before your due date because it can cause excessive contractions and may lead to your baby becoming distressed. If you need a hormone drip to speed up your labour, do not use clary sage at the same time as excessive contractions may occur.
- Always inform your midwife if you are using any essential oils or other complementary therapies during pregnancy, and especially during labour

If you would like more individualised advice about whether it is safe for you to use aromatherapy oils, please telephone Expectancy on **0906 400 6227** (calls charged at £1.50 per minute, from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may vary).

