USEFUL OILS FOR PREGNANCY AND LABOUR

- Grapefruit, bergamot or sweet orange are gentle oils which can boost your mood and help relax you – but avoid these if you are allergic to citrus fruit.
- Lavender is good for relaxation, helping you sleep and reducing blood pressure – but do not use it if you are on blood pressure medication or if you have an epidural in labour.
- Frankincense is fantastic for calming you if you are very anxious and is especially good in the transition stage of labour, at the end of the first stage.
- Black pepper is a brilliant pain-relieving oil and can be used for pregnancy aches and pains such as backache, and during labour – but it is quite strong-smelling so you may only want to use one drop.

PLEASE INFORM YOUR MIDWIFE IF YOU ARE USING AROMATHERAPY OILS DURING PREGNANCY OR IF YOU WANT TO USE THEM DURING YOUR LABOUR.

This leaflet was prepared by Denise Tirant MSc RM PGCEA on behalf of Expectancy and is intended as a guide only.

AROMATHERAPY IN PREGNANCY AND LABOUR

Information for mums-to-be

INTRODUCTION

Aromatherapy involves the use of highly concentrated pleasant-smelling plant oils. The oils also contain chemicals which give them different properties. Some oils are relaxing and help you to sleep, others are stimulating, increasing concentration and lifting your mood. Some oils contain pain-relieving chemicals, others affect your blood pressure and many help to fight infections.

Aromatherapy can be very beneficial during pregnancy, for relaxation and to ease discomforts such as backache, swollen ankles or carpal tunnel syndrome (wrist tingling). Research shows that having regular aromatherapy treatments towards the end of pregnancy helps your body to work more efficiently, increasing the chances that you will start labour naturally and have a normal labour and birth. In labour, aromatherapy can ease pain and aid contractions. Afterwards, it can help you recover from the birth, ease discomfort of stitches and help with breast feeding.

The most popular method of receiving aromatherapy is as a massage. The oils are absorbed via the skin into your bloodstream, passing to your internal organs and also crossing the placenta to your baby. Oils can be used in the bath, or as a compress, or inhaled. Whenever you smell the aromas, you are also inhaling chemicals from the oils, which pass from your lungs into your bloodstream, and also from your nostrils up the olfactory (smell) system to the mood centre in your brain, affecting your emotions.

Written for Expectancy by Denise Tirant
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PRECAUTIONS
Aromatherapy oils are very powerful and work in exactly the same way as drugs. Many should be avoided in pregnancy, labour or whilst breastfeeding; others can be used with caution in low doses. If you have any medical or pregnancy-related complications, particularly if you are taking any medication, or if you are expecting more than one baby, please ask for advice before using any aromatherapy oils.

A WORD ABOUT CLARY SAGE
Clary sage is an extremely popular aromatherapy oil as it is thought to help with labour. However, it is very powerful and should be used with extreme caution. Clary sage should NEVER be used before your estimated due date as it can cause excessive Braxton Hicks contractions which may distress your baby or cause complications such as bleeding.
If you are overdue, clary sage may be useful to trigger labour but it is vital to use it appropriately. Never apply clary sage directly to your tummy and never use it neat. A maximum of two drops can be diluted in a teaspoonful of carrier oil and added to your bath water. It is important that you tell your midwife that you are using clary sage as it can sometimes make your contractions too strong.
Do not use clary sage if you have any pregnancy or medical complications, including a low-lying placenta or placenta praevia, high blood pressure, or a history of a very rapid labour in a previous pregnancy. Do not use clary sage oil at all if you have had a previous Caesarean within the last two years. Using too much clary sage oil or using it too frequently or too early can lead to fetal distress and excessively strong contractions. After your baby is born, avoid using clary sage if you have very heavy bleeding as it can make it worse.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS IF YOU WISH TO USE ESSENTIAL OILS AT HOME
- Ensure that your oils are bought from a reputable health shop or online from a specialist aromatherapy supplier. They should be in small dark glass bottles and have an expiry date on them.
- Always dilute the oils in a carrier oil, eg grapeseed or sweet almond (unless you are allergic to almonds). Avoid baby oil as it is mineral-based which prevents the essential oils absorbing.
- In the bath, use just 3 – 4 drops of oil mixed in a small amount of carrier oil (or full-fat milk); for massage, use no more than 1 drop of essential oil in each 5ml (teaspoonful) of carrier oil.
- Essential oils should not be added to the bath or birthing pool during labour once your membranes (bag of waters) have ruptured to avoid any risks to your baby.
- If you wish to vaporise oils to make the room smell nice, do not leave the burner / vaporiser on for more than 10 – 15 minutes in each hour, and never leave them on all night.
- Aromatherapy oils should never used for babies under the age of three months. Do not vaporise oils where your new baby or toddlers are sleeping.