

# Aromatherapy in Maternity Services

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This information outlines the benefits and risks of the use of essential oils and aromatherapy during labour and birth and into the postnatal period.

Aromatherapy is used nationally as a complementary therapy. This is a service which is offered to women who choose their maternity care within United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust.

Studies have shown that women in labour consistently praise the use of aromatherapy and have found that it aids relaxation, reduces stress and raises energy levels. It is also effective in relieving symptoms such as anxiety, nausea and pain.

Aromatherapy may also be helpful to relieve common discomforts within the postnatal period.

It is essential that you seek advice from your midwife regarding the oils which are right for you. There is evidence to suggest that some essential oils are not advisable in relation to certain medical and pregnancy history and in some cases it is advisable for essential oils not to be used at all, but advice will be given in accordance with local guidelines for the use of aromatherapy.

## What is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils extracted from natural sources (plants and flowers) which can help to improve wellbeing for the mind and body.

Oils can enter the body through the skin and olfactory system (sense of smell), and can be administered by a variety of methods.

Essential oils work by stimulating the olfactory (smell) senses which release endorphins (the body's natural pain relief) via the central nervous system and can reduce pain by producing pleasant relaxing feelings, to uplift emotional state and produce euphoric sensations.

The chemical component of the oils is presumed to work in the same way as some medications.

Each essential oil has its own particular scent and effect.

Aromatherapy can support the natural birth process and can promote emotional and physical health.

# How are the essential oils administered?

## Inhalation

Labour ward has aromatherapy diffuser systems in the birthing rooms which diffuse the essential oils into the air which allow you to inhale the vapours into your body.

A few drops of essential oils on a tissue or cotton wool swab can also be an effective form of inhalation therapy.

## Massage

Oil particles are small enough to be absorbed by the skin. Massage therapy can assist in the absorption of the oils by increasing the blood flow. Touch is also effective in reducing pain and is very relaxing. The oils are mixed with grape seed oil as a carrier, as oils should not be applied neat on the skin.

## Compress

Essential oils are added to water and direct contact can be soothing to the body. Warm or cold compresses can be used.

## Bath

Essential oils can be dispersed in water when mixed with milk. Water is an effective form of pain relief in labour but when enhanced with essential oils this can increase its effectiveness. Oils can also be dispersed in the birthing pool.

## Lavage

Essential oils can be mixed with sterile water. The lavage of water is poured over the affected area. This can be effective in relieving inflammation and discomfort following tears or stitches after birth.

## Which oils can be used?

Following recent research the trust has chosen ten essential oils which provide the greatest benefit to women in early labour, established labour and birth and into the postnatal period. All of which are known to be safe.

### Bergamot

Sedating yet uplifting. Eases anxiety, stress and depression.

### Black Pepper

Relieves muscular aches and pains. Warming, stimulating effect. Aids concentration.

### Chamomile

Calming and relaxing. Eases irritability, tension and restlessness. Powerful anti-inflammatory.

### Clary sage

Encourages contractions. Euphoric sedative. Pain relief.

### Frankincense

Eases sudden onset anxiety, panic and fear.

### Grapefruit

Relief of fear and anxiety. Uplifting citrus aroma. Mild pain relieving properties.

### Tea Tree

Eases shock. Antifungal and antiseptic.

### Jasmine

Calming yet uplifting, energising. Antidepressant qualities. Stimulates milk production.

### Lavender

Calming, balancing, sedating, relaxing, pain relieving. Antibacterial and antimicrobial.

### Peppermint

Eases nausea and headaches. Stimulates the mind, eliminates fatigue and encourages contractions.

All the above oils are available within the hospital and can be administered by a midwife who has undertaken aromatherapy training and who is aware of your medical and pregnancy history. Please note we can only administer oils provided by

the hospital, oils brought in from home can be used personally but cannot be administered by the midwife.

## When can aromatherapy be used?

### In early stages of labour and/or induction

Essential oils can be really helpful for problems such as anxiety, stress and fear. Tiredness can be a major factor in early labour, therefore, some of the more uplifting oils can be used to relieve this.

### Established labour

As labour progresses pain relieving oils can be administered to help with this. This is also a way of your birthing partner becoming more involved in the labour process and working

together promotes empowerment for you both. Massage and touch can be extremely beneficial in labour and birth.

### Postnatal period

Essential oils can help promote wound healing and support milk production for breastfeeding mothers. Also some oils are thought to assist in reducing symptoms of postnatal depression.

### Side effects

From a large study of 8000 women undertaken at the John Radcliffe hospital it was reported that only a small proportion (1%) of mothers had any side effects from using aromatherapy. These side effects included nausea, vomiting, headaches and allergic responses.

When providing care for women in labour using aromatherapy, the oils can sometimes affect others present. If your birth

partner(s) suffers from illnesses such as epilepsy, asthma, cardiac problems, high or low blood pressure, is pregnant or breastfeeding then please inform your midwife caring for you so that your oils can be adapted accordingly.

It is recognised by midwives working for the trust that a woman must be able to set her own atmosphere for labour as well as helping her cope both physically and mentally.

If you would like to use aromatherapy during labour please discuss this with your

midwife and include this in your birth preferences.

We hope that you find the aromatherapy service useful for your labour and birth experience and you may be asked to kindly provide feedback following use to enable us to enhance the service in the future.

## References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email [patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk)

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