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 such as oranges.
- 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 lavender triggers hay fever.
- Frankincense is a fantastic calming oil if you are anxious and is especially good in transition, at the end of the first stage of labour just before your baby is born.
- Black pepper is a brilliant pain-relieving oil: it can be useful for pregnancy aches and pains such as backache, and for labour – but it's strong-smelling so only use one or two drops.

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 Dr Denise Tiran HonDUniv FRCM MSc RM PGCEA on behalf of Expectancy and is intended as a guide only.

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AROMATHERAPY IN PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

Information for expectant and birthing parents

INTRODUCTION

Aromatherapy involves the use of highly concentrated pleasant-smelling plant oils for relaxation and to ease discomforts. Hundreds of chemicals in the oils give them various physical and emotional effects. Some oils are relaxing and help you to sleep, others are stimulating or lift your mood. Many are pain-relieving, some affect blood pressure and many help to fight infections. In labour, aromatherapy can ease pain and aid progress, and may help avoid the need for medical intervention. The oils are diluted and can be used for massage, inhaled or added to water.

PRECAUTIONS

- If you can smell the aromas, you are inhaling chemicals, which pass via your lungs into your bloodstream. The oils are very powerful and work in exactly the same way as drugs.
- Many oils 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 complications, especially if you are taking any medication, please ask your midwife for advice before using or receiving aromatherapy.

Written for Expectancy by Denise Tiran
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HERE ARE SOME TIPS IF YOU WISH TO USE ESSENTIAL OILS AT HOME

- Ensure that your oils are bought from a specialist aromatherapy supplier. They should be in small dark glass bottles, with a dropper inside and have an expiry date on them.
- Always dilute the oils in a carrier oil, eg grapeseed. 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 grapeseed oil; for massage, use no more than 2 drops of essential oil to each 5ml (teaspoon) of grapeseed oil.
- Essential oils should *not* be added to the bath or birthing pool during labour once your membranes (waters) have ruptured to avoid any risks to your baby.
- Do not use diffusers for more than 10–15 minutes each hour; never leave them on all night.
- Aromatherapy oils should *never* be used for, or near, babies under three months old.
- *Never* diffuse oils where your new baby or toddlers are sleeping.
- If you are having a home birth, check with your midwife before using aromatherapy oils.
- *Never* leave diffusers on throughout your labour as prolonged use can cause complications. It is essential to stop all aromatherapy before your baby is born.
- Do *not* add oils into the birthing pool, especially once your waters have broken.

A WORD ABOUT CLARY SAGE

Clary sage oil is extremely popular as it is thought to help with labour. However, it must be used with extreme caution and should **NEVER** be used before 37 weeks of pregnancy as it may cause early or excessive contractions leading to complications such as fetal distress or vaginal bleeding.

If you are overdue, clary sage may help to trigger labour - but check with your midwife first. Two drops diluted in a teaspoonful of grapeseed oil can be used for massage or added to your bath water (unless your waters have broken). Beware: if you use clary sage for too long in labour, it can make your contractions too strong, causing fetal distress. Be guided by your midwife who can assess the progress of your labour.

Never use clary sage if you have any pregnancy or medical complications, especially high blood pressure, obstetric cholestasis (pregnancy liver condition) or a history of rapid labour in a previous pregnancy. Avoid clary sage oil if you've had a Caesarean within the last two years as it can stress the scar and cause serious labour complications. After the birth, avoid it if you have very heavy bleeding.