

Aromatherapy in labour

This leaflet has been produced to provide information for women who would like to use aromatherapy during labour (past 37 weeks of pregnancy).

What is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is a complementary therapy using the concentrated extracts of plants for their therapeutic properties.

Aromatherapy is considered to be a holistic form of complementary medicine which works due to the combination of the chemical constituents of the oils, the method of administration and the effect of the aromas on the limbic system (part of the brain involved in our behavioural and emotional responses) that affects mood.

At the Royal Berkshire Hospital, following a risk assessment undertaken, we can offer you aromatherapy using selected pre-blended oils. These are chosen to help the birthing mother in the following ways: as pain relief, as an emotional coping strategy, to calm and ease fear, to uplift, or to stimulate stronger uterine surges (contractions).

Your informed consent and that of your birthing partner will be required before offering aromatherapy. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time you wish. Your midwife will document the use of aromatherapy on your records. You may be asked to complete an evaluation form after aromatherapy; this is for audit purposes and to allow us to ensure the aromatherapy service is meeting the needs of our mothers, helping us to develop and improve the service.

Safety information

Unfortunately, aromatherapy is not suitable for some women, so the midwife who will carry out the aromatherapy during childbirth will complete a thorough risk assessment with you beforehand.

The risk assessment will include assessing the risk for your birth partner also. If your birthing partner may be harmed by exposure to aromatherapy, we will be unable to offer this to you. Aromatherapy oil is for external use only and is not to be taken orally. All aromatherapy oils should be kept out of reach of children.

Oils supplied are for personal use only.

Possible side effects

- Mild skin irritation, or redness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

If any reaction occurs stop the massage, footbath, or get out of the bath.

Open the window and wash off the oils immediately with warm soapy water.

In the unlikely event that skin irritation appears severe, use a cold compress with water only.

Choice of blends

- **Uplift:** To boost women who are tired, anxious, running out of steam (example for use; in early labour or if labouring mother is tired). Sweet orange and ylang ylang in 2% blend (ylang ylang can lower blood pressure so not suitable for mothers with low blood pressure). This blend aims to boost mood, calm feelings of fear and panic.
- **Contraction blend 1:** This blend of oils may be used to promote contractions, if contractions have reduced in a previously established labour. Only for use in a **spontaneous labour**. Not for use with epidural, unsuitable in vaginal birth after Caesarean (VBAC) and not to be used on an antenatal ward. This 2% blend bergamot, clary sage, lavender is calming, reduces feelings of stress and fatigue, and is uterine stimulating with analgesic (pain relieving) properties.
- **Contraction blend 2:** As above – only for use in normal, previously established labour where contractions have reduced. Jasmine and sweet orange 2% blend. This blend aims to stimulate uterine contractions, while increasing self-confidence and optimism, lifting and boosting mood, also has analgesic (pain relieving) properties.
- **Relaxing and grounding:** A 2% blend of frankincense and lavender, it aims to promote a sense of calm, reducing fear, panic and anxiety. It aims to increase your own endorphins and has analgesic (pain relieving) properties.

How will the oils be applied?

You will be offered a choice of method. Via massage (blended with grapeseed oil); this can be applied by the midwife, MCA, or your risk assessed birth partner. The oils can be used in a foot bath (blended with distilled water using polysorbate 20 as a gentle emulsifier ***contains coconut**). Oils can also be aromatised in the room (currently by using a bowl of hot water). Or you may choose to have the oil placed on a tissue for you to inhale if you prefer.

Please inform the midwife if you have any allergies

Effects on baby

The concentration of oils used are not high enough to cause a problem to the baby. The oils chosen for use in our blends have been selected as safe for use.

Aftercare

Drink plenty of water during and after the aromatherapy treatment. Avoid use of alcohol, caffeine and tobacco. Take care when driving as reflexes may be slower.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

J Hunter/E Maycock, Snr Midwives Rushey & MLU, May 2021

Next review due: May 2023

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