

Aromatherapy in Pregnancy

Aromatherapy, the therapeutic use of essential oils, can be highly beneficial during pregnancy, helping to alleviate both existing conditions and many common physical and emotional symptoms which potentially arise at different stages of pregnancy.

During pregnancy anything absorbed by the mother's body may cross over to the baby, so preferably use organic or wild crafted oils of the highest standards. Essential oils, just like any oil, will degrade when exposed to light, heat and air so purchase small quantities (5mls), keep them in a cool, dark place and use them!

In the first three months, for your own peace of mind, you may prefer not to use essential oils in massage, just as you will probably be avoiding certain foods and other products. It is quite possible that many everyday items could contain oils or chemicals which might be less 'friendly' than a couple of drops of good essential oil but it is important to respect your sensitivities in these first months, so if it doesn't feel right, don't use oils at this stage. However, there is no reason not to use oils in your environment.

Inhale oils for nausea and sickness, one drop on a tissue as required when symptoms hit; Lemon and Spearmint are key oils here. Choose which is for you by thinking of 'opal fruits' and chewing gum! You will quickly realise which you are drawn to and that will be your oil; Lemon for fruits, Spearmint for gum. Carry your preferred oil with you and do make sure it's by your bedside if the morning is a difficult time.

A lovely way to use oils at any stage of pregnancy is to put two and four drops in an oil burner or diffuser. Grapefruit and Eucalyptus are very refreshing if you need to perk up; Eucalyptus and Myrtle are excellent decongestants if you have a cold. Chamomile, Lavender and Mandarin encourage us to relax and unwind. Palmarosa helps us 'go with the flow', Geranium will harmonise and balance the mood, while sunny Bergamot cheers everything up! Experiment with these oils to find combinations that you enjoy most – your favorites may change day by day with your mood and circumstances. For a 'quick fix', a drop of any of these oils may be put on a tissue and inhaled directly.

By the second trimester it will be quite appropriate to use essential oils diluted in a carrier oil on the skin, but in a lower proportion than for the non-pregnant woman, perhaps 4 drops for a massage. In the final trimester the amounts of essential oil could be increased to approximately half that usually used, so around 6 drops for a full massage. (These amounts are appropriate for organic oils where typically less is required than for non-organic oils)

From this stage onwards using oil or cream on the abdomen, thighs and other areas that are growing will nourish the skin hopefully making it more resilient to being stretched and may therefore help avoid or diminish stretch marks. A good organic base oil, such as sunflower, with a few drops each of

organic Lavender, Mandarin and Sandalwood added to it will make a wonderful oil to regenerate, tone and nourish the skin. Prepare just a small quantity at a time, using about 8-10 drops of essential oil to 25mls of base oil.

You may also enjoy oils in a bath, using any of those suggested above for oil burners. Full-fat milk, an emulsion of fats and water, provides a simple, safe medium for dispersing oils in water, avoiding drops of oil floating in the water which might cause skin irritation. Put three drops of essential oil into a tablespoon of milk then add to the bath water. Preferably avoid soap or shampoo which wash away the oils.

In the third trimester, oils are wonderful for many of the issues which may now arise. For swollen ankles a tablespoon of carrier, or base, oil – olive oil will be fine – with a couple of drops each of Cypress and Lemon may help to reduce swelling and improve drainage in the affected area. Gently massage the oil from the feet upwards to stimulate drainage. The same mixture massaged firmly into the palms of the hands and across the inside of wrists may help with carpal tunnel syndrome.

For digestive problems, try two drops of Mandarin oil and one of Cardamom in a teaspoon of olive oil, massaged over the stomach which is by now being compressed upwards by your bump, and also over the mid to lower back area.

Should you experience night cramps, typically occurring in the calves of the legs, one drop of Lavender rubbed into the affected area at bedtime will often alleviate the problem. Keep the oil by your bed and should cramp strike, rub another drop into the cramping muscle as fast as possible. Lavender is a great muscle relaxant - the effect is pretty much instant!

During the last weeks sleep may become an issue. Two drops of Vetiver in an oil burner in the bedroom encourages good quality sleep or at least relaxation if you can't sleep. For safety's sake invest in an electric oil burner or vaporiser especially if using oils at night.

Many other oils could also be helpful now in baths or oil burners. Try Sandalwood, grounding and insightful; meditative Frankincense to deepen the breath and calm the soul; Melissa strengthens the heart and mind, dispelling fear and uncertainty and Rose, the ultimately feminine oil.

Whatever you choose, enjoy good quality oils in the knowledge that your unborn baby will be also benefiting from them! Have fun.

