Using Aromatherapy in Pregnancy & Labour

Regular aromatherapy during pregnancy can help you relax & relieve many of the discomforts, such as backache or swollen ankles. However, do remember that the oils contain chemicals which act like drugs & many are not suitable for pregnant mums. These guidelines may help you to use aromatherapy oils safely at home or to find a therapist who can treat you appropriately, but if in doubt, ask your midwife or contact Expectancy.

• avoid using any oils in the first 3 months unless advised by an expert. Don't assume that, just because they're natural, they're automatically safe.

• many oils should be avoided in pregnancy, because of possible effects on your developing baby or on you, eg some may increase blood pressure

• suitable safe oils for pregnancy are lavender, citrus oils eg orange, mandarin, grapefruit, as well as ylang ylang, frankincense, chamomile & neroli

• use as little essential oil as possible: 2 drops in 5ml of carrier oil eg sweet almond; if you want to use more than 2 drops of essential oil increase the amount of carrier oil

• don’t leave vaporisers on longer than 10 - 15 min in each hour – it’s unnecessary & may cause nausea. You can’t use candle vaporisers in the hospital labour ward, because of fire risks. Electrical vaporisers must be checked by the hospital electrician – so plan ahead

• in labour, aromatherapy can help you relax & relieve pain but check with your midwife to avoid complications especially if you need drugs to stimulate contractions

• don’t add oils to the birthing pool if your waters have broken, to avoid risks to your baby

• ask someone to massage your feet, shoulders, tummy; use oils in a foot bath if you don’t want to be touched, or make a compress to put over the small of your back.

• lavender and clary sage may ease pain, aid contractions and relax you; grapefruit is uplifting; spearmint or peppermint ease nausea. Other oils for labour include jasmine, bergamot, chamomile, frankincense, mandarin, neroli, rose, ylang ylang

• if you would like a private aromatherapist to be with you during labour, discuss it in advance with your midwife. Most maternity units will support your wishes but may require the therapist to confirm she has insurance cover.

• Always inform your midwife if you are using any essential oils or other complementary therapies during pregnancy, and especially during labour.

Leaflet written by Denise Tiran, Expectancy’s Director, and intended as a general guide only
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