

Massage and aromatherapy for expectant mothers



Our philosophy

Maternity services at Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust aim to provide you with all the support you need during your pregnancy and birthing of your baby. If you would like to use aromatherapy essential oils through these processes, then these can be blended and offered to you from our own stock on site, or you are welcome to bring your own oils or blends from our recommended list. Many of our midwives are trained to support your birth partner in using aromatherapy and massage techniques.

What are essential oils?

Essential oils are natural oils typically obtained by distillation and have the characteristic odour and properties of the plant or source from which it is extracted. They can be used to make a scented, supportive oil when added to a base, or carrier oil. A carrier oil is usually a vegetable oil, used to dilute essential oils before they are applied to the skin in massage.

Is aromatherapy safe for everybody?

If your pregnancy has been uncomplicated, and you are expecting that the birth of your baby will be straightforward, without need for interventions, aromatherapy should be safe for you. This will be discussed with you by your midwife, taking into account your medical history.

Are there any side effects?

There is varied evidence on the use of essential oils in pregnancy and for labour, however studies showed no evidence to suggest that they are not safe when used appropriately. Many hospitals around the country are now offering aromatherapy services. Potential side effects include a headache, nausea, and feeling dizzy; however a large study recently reported that less than 1% of mothers using oils reported any side effect.

Can I use essential oils in hospital?

We are happy for you to bring your own supply of essential oils to use whilst in hospital/at the birth centre. Please be aware that all use of oils, particularly in the ward environments of Wheal Rose and Wheal Fortune are at the discretion of the midwife. It is his or her responsibility to ensure the comfort and safety of

all those on the ward and to consider the impact of oil use of the wider ward community at any given time. **Please check with your named midwife prior to using any aromatherapy oils in the ward environment.**

Can I use aromatherapy if I am overdue?

If your pregnancy extends beyond 40 weeks you may be offered an aromatherapy treatment to help encourage labour. Your midwife may also be able to provide you with an aromatherapy blend to use at home and will guide you in how to do this.

When shouldn't I use essential oils?

- We are a nut-free service – please refrain from using a nut-based carrier oil. **Grapeseed oil is recommended.**
- Wait one hour from your waters breaking, or being broken, to use aromatherapy oils. You can still use massage with an unscented oil during this hour if you wish.
- Avoid abdominal massage if your scans have shown your placenta is situated on the anterior (front) of your uterus (you can read this on your scan report or ask your midwife).
- Avoid abdominal massage if you have previously, or during this pregnancy, had an antepartum haemorrhage or been told you have placenta praevia.

Which oils should I use?

Our aromatherapy and massage service is a new provision and during the initial year consideration has been made to carefully select the following essential oils. Our staff are developing their aromatherapy knowledge and this list may be expanded in time.

You can buy base/carrier oils, bottles to put an oil blend in, and essential oils from local pharmacists and health food stores, or online from a retailer of your choice. Choose the best quality you can afford – ideally cold pressed, unrefined and organic oils.

Diluting essential oils into a blend is a critical safety practice when using essential oils.

To support your induction of labour experience and latent labour phase – we recommend you make yourself the following blend (known as a 1% blend):

- 20ml of a carrier oil of your choice
- a total of four drops of essential oil from the following selection:
 - lavender
 - jasmine
 - frankincense
 - orange.

Please carefully label your bottle of oil with your name and its contents, including the blend percentage.

For birthing your baby – we recommend you make yourself the following blend (known as a 2% blend):

- 20ml of a carrier oil of your choice
- A total of eight drops of essential oil – from the following selection (we recommend not using more than 3 oils in your blend):
 - chamomile
 - lavender
 - frankincense
 - jasmine
 - orange.

Please carefully label your bottle of oil with your name and its contents, included the blend percentage.

Peppermint

Peppermint oil can alleviate nausea, pain and itching. You may wish to use this if you suffer from pregnancy sickness/hyperemesis and it is common to feel nauseous in labour. It can also be helpful for back pain during pregnancy.

Peppermint should not be used in the postnatal period as it can affect breastfeeding.

Clary Sage

This oil is well known for its properties in both starting and helping with labour. We would not recommend you use it in your blend if you are considering using pethidine or epidural as forms of pain relief, or have had previous uterine surgery, or a history of haemorrhage. If you do use it, use it in blends instead of Jasmine. Please note – we do not use this oil in the ward environment, for example on Wheal Rose where inductions are initiated. This is to avoid the oil coming into contact with those who will not benefit from it in earlier stages of pregnancy.

Properties of our recommended oils related to induction and birthing

Relaxing / calming

- Chamomile
- Lavender
- Frankincense

Pain relieving

- Lavender
- Clary Sage – avoid until 37 weeks
- Chamomile
- Peppermint

Encourages labour

These oils are very strong and should not be used until after 37 weeks of pregnancy

- Jasmine
- Clary Sage

Sedating (aids sleep)

- Chamomile
- Lavender

Uplifting (mood enhancing)

- Orange
- Peppermint

Chamomile (Roman chamomile) – analgesic anti-inflammatory, febrifuge (reduces fever). A very soothing oil easing anxiety, tension, and fear. Promotes relaxation, gives patience and calms.

Clary Sage (Salvia sclarea) – uterotonic (tones the uterus / encourages contractions), antiseptic, sedative. An oil which has strong effects on the womb, and reported to encourage labour. It has a strong scent and can give feelings of euphoria. To be used with caution in clinical settings where other pain relief is in use.

Frankincense (Boswellia carteri/thurifera) – anti-inflammatory, calming, uterotonic. This deeply meditative oil can help ground and centre you.

Jasmine (Jasminium grandiflorum) –antiseptic, parturient, uterotonic. This oil is reputed to strengthen contractions and help relieve pain at the same time. It is balancing and restoring of energy.

Lavender (Lavendula officinalis) – analgesic, antiseptic, restorative. This oil has strong pain-relieving qualities and can be very helpful for perineal healing.

Orange (Citrus sinensis) – antiseptic, anti-depressant, antispasmodic. Sunny and radiant oil bringing happiness and warmth to the mind. It is strengthening and refreshing.

Peppermint (Mentha piperita) – analgesic, reduces nausea and itching, cooling, uplifting. Powerful and stimulating oil, can have an overwhelming aroma, use a few drops on a tissue for an immediate effect.

Any questions?

The information in this leaflet is based on current evidence. It is for guidance only and is not intended to be prescriptive.

If you have any questions about using massage and aromatherapy during pregnancy or labour, or need any further information, please speak to your midwife.

This cover illustration was developed for our service by Joanne Nethercott, a Cornwall based illustrator. Joanne holds a BA (Hons) Illustration and Printmaking, with over 10 years experience in design for print and web. She has worked on a huge variety of illustration projects from childrens' books, theatre posters, logo design, to online gaming and greetings cards. Her style combines traditional hand drawn illustration with digital backgrounds.

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