York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Aromatherapy for Childbirth

Information for patients, relatives and carers

ⓘ For more information, please contact your midwife or the ANC on 01904 726869 for York or 01723 236869 for Scarborough.

Safety note: Essential oils are not to be taken internally: never eat or drink them.

What is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy uses oils called ‘essential oils’ which are extracted from plants and used in a variety of ways for therapeutic benefit.

Essential oils can have impact on the emotions and psychological wellbeing of a person as well as physically in the way that conventional medicines work.

Aromatherapy can help lift mood and promote relaxation which is very helpful in labour.

Challenging symptoms such as nausea, headaches and pain can often be eased by aromatherapy.

For evidence-based information and advice on the safe use of Complementary Therapies during pregnancy and childbirth, please speak to your midwife.

It should be noted that aromatherapy is a complementary therapy and evidence on its use is anecdotal as opposed to clinical trials. It should be used in conjunction with routine care not as an alternative.

Who can use Aromatherapy for Childbirth?

Women are free to self-administer aromatherapy; however, it is advisable to seek advice from an Aromatherapist or a midwife who has received training in using aromatherapy.

Women who have given verbal consent to use aromatherapy and are cared for by a midwife who has received training to use aromatherapy.

Women who have been assessed and have contraindications excluded.

How is Aromatherapy Provided?

How are the essential oils used?

The oils can be administered in various ways including:

- Massage
- Bath, footbath, perineal wash
- Compress
- Inhalation (taper, cotton ball, droplet on forehead and palm)

How might aromatherapy and massage help during labour and birth?

- By reducing stress or anxiety and aiding relaxation
- By helping to alleviate discomfort and pain
- Can facilitate normal birth
- May reduce the need for further analgesia
- May help to enhance contractions
- Can help ease physical discomfort (for example, nausea and headaches

Who will administer the essential oils?

Midwives who have been trained to use aromatherapy during labour and birth will discuss and recommend the most suitable oils and method of administration. Your midwife or a clinical support worker can administer the oils or show you how to use them safely.
Your birth supporter can also be shown some simple massage strokes which may help.

Which essential oils do we use and how might they help?

Lavender - analgesic, anti-inflammatory, calming, relaxing, reduces stress and anxiety, may help to relieve perineal pain.

Clary Sage - analgesic, relaxing, may help to enhance contractions.

Mandarin - citrusy, uplifting, relaxing, reduces stress and anxiety.

Frankincense - warming, calming, may alleviate anxiety and feelings of panic.

Peppermint - excellent analgesic, has a cooling effect, may help to alleviate headaches and nausea.

Are there any side effects?

Amounts of essential oils used are very small and are unlikely to cause any irritation.

If a reaction did occur, the oil would be washed off with soap and water.

Massage can still be provided without essential oils to good effect and essential oils can still be used via non-direct touch methods such as vaporisation.

Avoid direct contact with citrus or any other oils if very sensitive or allergic.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: The Clinical Midwifery Manager, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 726720.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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