

The use of essential oils and massage to help with your labour

Introduction

This leaflet gives you and your birthing partner information about the benefits and safe use of essential oils and massage during your labour. The service is offered to you by Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Many of our midwives are trained to be able to advise and administer essential oils to you during labour.

What are essential oils and massage?

Essential oils are highly concentrated elements from plants that have a range of therapeutic (beneficial) properties which may help you during labour.

Massage involves manipulation of soft tissues for medical or therapeutic purposes or simply as an aid for relaxation.

What are the benefits of using essential oils and/or massage during labour?

- To help you to relax and reduce fear and tension during labour.
- To provide a natural form of pain relief during labour.
- May help to speed up your labour.
- To help ease physical discomfort during labour, such as nausea and headaches.

How is this service offered during labour when you are in hospital?

This is an optional service available to you during your labour. It is offered by midwives who are trained to advise and administer these therapies. There are guidelines in place to support this service.

Your midwife will be happy to discuss this service with you as part of your preparation for your labour and birth.

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Patient Information

How will the essential oils be used?

There are various ways that the essential oils can be used:

- In a bath or footbath.
- Via massage - your midwife will be able to show your birthing partner some useful massage techniques.
- Via a droplet on the palm of your hand.
- Via a hot or cold compress using a flannel.
- Via a droplet on a cardboard perfume strip or pillow.
- By compress in the bath to assist healing of your stitches following delivery.
- Via a spray bottle.
- Via an aromatherapy diffuser (restrictions to settings will apply, such as when in theatre).

What oils are offered and what are their properties?

- **Bergamot** essential oil is extracted from the bergamot citrus fruit. It can help reduce pain during labour. It also has a calming effect.
- **Clary sage** essential oil is derived from the salvia sclarea herb. It has a sweet, nutty smell and can help reduce pain, fear and tension and may also help speed up your labour. **Caution: Please note this essential oil has very strong properties that can affect your baby. Do not use without professional guidance.**
- **Frankincense** essential oil is derived from the resin on the boswellia tree and is used for calming nervous tension and hyperventilation. This oil can also help to balance emotions.
- **Jasmine** essential oil is derived from the jasmine flower and is used for reducing anxiety and pain. It may also help to speed up labour. **Caution: This oil can have a strong effect and should not be used at home without professional guidance.**
- **Lavender** essential oil is distilled from the lavender plant and is a good all round essential oil that helps calm, relax and reduce pain as well as help with headaches.

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- **Peppermint** essential oil is derived from the peppermint plant and is a cooling and refreshing oil, useful for sickness and nausea during labour and can also help clear headaches.
- **Chamomile Roman** essential oil is derived from the Roman Chamomile plant and has a warm, sweet fruity oil. It helps reduce pain and relieves anxiety and tension.
- **Geranium** essential oil is derived by steam distillation from the leaves of the geranium plant. It is good for promoting relaxation in labour, reducing fear, helping with pain and can help with irritability.
- **Lemon** essential oil is derived from the peel of the lemon. It promotes relaxation and calm and is good for fatigue and boosting energy.
- **Lime** essential oil is derived from the peel of the lime fruit, it is cooling and refreshing, and energising in labour.
- **Mandarin** essential oil is obtained by cold expression of the mandarin fruit wall. It is a calming and uplifting oil which can help with stress and tension in labour.
- **Petitgrain** essential oil is extracted from the leaves and green twigs of the bitter orange tree. It is useful when feeling restless and may help to reduce a rapid pulse. It is good for panic attacks.
- **Ylang Ylang** essential oil is made from the flowers of *Cananga odorata*. It has a sedative effect and can help promote the feeling of calm. It helps pace breathing and may help slow down a racing pulse.

Caution: Please be aware that essential oils can be very powerful and if misused could cause serious harm to you or your baby. Only use at home if you have had professional guidance.

**Patient
Information**

Can everyone use essential oils and massage during their labour?

Most women between 37 to 42 weeks pregnant can use essential oils during their labour. However, there are some medical and pregnancy conditions as well as some labour complications where the use of essential oils is not recommended. Your midwife will be able to advise you on whether this is a suitable service for you.

Can I use essential oils and massage at the same time as taking pain relief?

Yes. Your midwife will be able to advise you at the time of what combinations would be most beneficial.

Can I use essential oils if I am having a caesarean?

Yes. Some essential oils can be very calming if used just before your caesarean section. Your midwife will be able to advise you.

Can I bring my own oils in to use?

We prefer you to use oils supplied by the hospital as they are sourced from a highly reputable supplier to make sure of the quality, safety and accuracy in prescribing. If you bring your own oils to use while in labour, our midwives will be unable to advise and administer them.

Useful things you may wish to bring into hospital if you wish to make use of this service

- Flannels
- Hand towel

Patient Information

Contact Information

Gloucestershire Birth Centre

Tel: 0300 422 5523

Cheltenham Birth Centre

Tel: 0300 422 2324

Stroud Maternity

Tel: 0300 421 8018

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>