

# Aromatherapy during childbirth

## Information for women



This leaflet outlines the benefits and risks of using essential oils and aromatherapy during labour.

---

---

## **What is aromatherapy?**

It is a complementary therapy using essential oils - concentrated extracts from a wide range of plants. The oils work in two ways:

1. By stimulating the nasal / olfactory senses (smell) and mental responses promoting relaxation.
2. The chemical components of the oils are presumed to work in the same ways as medicines, but are not suitable to be taken by mouth.

At Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust we can offer you aromatherapy as a method of pain relief during childbirth. Many of our midwives have been trained by a qualified midwife / aromatherapist to enable them to offer women aromatherapy in labour.

## **Benefits of aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy is used nationally as a complementary therapy for women in labour. Research has shown that women in labour consistently rated aromatherapy as helpful by aiding relaxation and reducing stress and anxiety. The study also showed that women using aromatherapy were less likely to request diamorphine or an epidural for pain relief.

## **How are the oils applied?**

The aromatherapy oils can be applied in a variety of ways, including:

- In the bath (but NOT in the birthing pool)
- By massage
- In a footbath
- In a compress
- By inhalation methods

The carrier oil that we use for blending our essential oils for massage is grapeseed oil.

---

---

## Can anyone use aromatherapy?

If your pregnancy has been uncomplicated and it is expected that your labour will be straightforward, then you may be able to use essential oils during your labour. It will also depend on whether the midwife who is looking after you has been trained to offer aromatherapy.

## Side effects and safety

Some essential oils may be harmful in pregnancy. The oils that we use have been chosen for their safety and effectiveness. Your midwife will advise you on which essential oils and method of use will benefit you most.

Women with respiratory conditions such as asthma or other allergies or sensitivities may not be able to use aromatherapy oils. They are also not recommended for certain conditions such as a previous caesarean birth.

A large research study of more than 8,000 women also found that a small proportion of women (around 1%) experienced side effects from using aromatherapy oils. These included side effects included vomiting and nausea, headache, allergic response (symptoms like hay fever, watery eyes). These symptoms may have occurred during the course of labour even if the aromatherapy had not been used.

## Finding out more

To find out more about using aromatherapy during childbirth, please talk to your midwife.


The website [www.expectancy.co.uk](http://www.expectancy.co.uk) provides a list of aromatherapists qualified to provide advice in pregnancy and childbirth.

---

---

## Further information and advice can be obtained from:

**NHS 111**  
**NHS Choices online**

 **111**  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

Issue date: Pending Approval  
Database reference: RWF-DocTemp-GL1

Review date: Nov 2019  
© MTW NHS Trust

Disclaimer: Printed copies of this document may not be the most recent version.  
The master copy is held on Q-Pulse Document Management System  
This copy – REV1.0

---