

Moxibustion

Introduction

Birth is most likely to be straightforward if your baby has his or her head downwards (cephalic) at the start of labour. Most babies who are in a bottom down (breech) position will turn to the more usual head down position by 35 weeks. After this time they may turn by themselves but this becomes less likely. If your baby is in the breech position after 35 weeks you might choose for a doctor to try to turn your baby by hand (External Cephalic Version or ECV) and you might also want to try moxibustion. This is a traditional Chinese therapy that may encourage a breech baby to turn head downwards.

What is moxibustion?

During this therapy herbal moxa sticks are lit and placed close to acupuncture points on your feet to give a gentle heat. It is thought to increase the baby's movements, helping him or her to become active enough to somersault into the head down position. It is also thought to improve the tone of the muscles in the mother's uterus, making it more likely for the baby to stay in the right position.



Research evidence suggests that moxibustion, when combined with the use of helpful positions (described below), is safe and increases your chance of turning a baby to the head down position.

What does moxibustion involve?

Your midwife will give you some moxa sticks to use at home, explaining how to light them and place them next to the acupuncture points on your little toes, close enough to feel pleasantly warm, but not enough to feel uncomfortable or to burn the skin. This will probably be easier if you can get your partner, another family member or a friend to help you so that you can use the moxa sticks on both feet at the same time. You will need to use moxibustion twice a day for seven days for ten minutes each time (morning and evening).

Research has shown that moxibustion is most likely to work when the mother also spends ten minutes twice a day in what is called the 'knee chest position'. Your midwife will show you how to do this.

You will also be given an appointment at the Day Assessment Unit, Tunbridge Wells Hospital, for another scan to check your baby's position at around 36-37 weeks.

Can everyone have moxibustion?

For most women moxibustion is thought to be a safe choice, however, there are some situations where your midwife or doctor would advise against it, e.g. if you have had a previous caesarean birth, if your baby is not growing well, if your placenta is low lying, if you have had bleeding from your vagina, or your waters have broken. An ECV is not advised for the same reasons.

Are there any side effects or risks?

- As far as we know there are no serious safety concerns
 - It may cause some mild contractions
 - It is not uncommon for the baby to become more active for a few hours following treatments; this is probably part of the process of encouraging the baby to turn
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Moxibustion in use

- Be careful to hold the moxa sticks a little bit away from your skin to make sure you don't burn yourself
- The moxa sticks will produce smoke similar to cigarette smoke which can make some women feel sick; for this reason it is best to do it in a room with good ventilation, or even outside
- Please ensure that lit moxa sticks are not left unattended and are fully extinguished before disposal as they could be the source of ignition for a house fire

At home, if you have any queries regarding this procedure please contact the Day Assessment Unit on the telephone number on the next page.

What if it doesn't work?

Research has shown that moxibustion combined with helpful positions (explained above) is successful in turning about 60% of breech babies; however, it does not work for everyone.


If your baby is still in the breech position, when you attend your appointment at 36-37 weeks in the Day Assessment Unit, we will offer you the chance to have a doctor try to turn your baby by hand. Please ask to see the ECV information leaflet for more details on this option.

We are pleased to offer the moxibustion treatment free of charge, however, any donation to help cover costs will be gratefully received.

Further information and advice can be obtained from

Expectancy: Complementary therapies for pregnancy and childbirth

Telephone:

 0845 230 1323


Email:

info@expectancy.co.uk

Web:

www.expectancy.co.uk

NHS 111

 111

NHS Choices online

www.nhs.uk

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please call us:

Tunbridge Wells Hospital (Pembury)

Maternity Day Assessment

☎ 01892 633041

Maidstone Hospital

Maternity Day Assessment

☎ 01622 227121

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Telephone: ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

Email: 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.

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Issue date: April 2016

Database reference: RWF-OPLF-PWC107

Review date: April 2019

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