

# INHALATION OF ESSENTIAL OILS DURING PREGNANCY

By NeDina Brocks-Capla

Some pregnancies are stressful; some are not so, it is important to keep the stress level down when and wherever possible during the pregnancy. Stress can lead to depression, premature delivery, loss of appetite, and low birth weight infants however, it can be relieved very effectively with essential oils, and their use by inhalation. This is especially beneficial for emotional support. In recent years complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has been widely used for the purpose of relaxation in stressful environments, now a large number of pregnant women use (CAM).

Inhaling aromatherapy has been going on for centuries and passed down from generation to generation. Today the practice is still going strong due to the need for natural alternative medicines and their widespread healing effects. Inhalation of essential oils has been especially helpful during pregnancy because it can improve overall attitude, feelings of fear, depression, anxiety, along with relief in areas of morning sickness, vomiting and assist with relaxing and calming the body.

When an essential oil is inhaled the odor molecules travel up your nose where they stimulate the olfactory membranes. The olfactory membranes are part of the larger limbic system in the brain. This system encompasses memories, emotional responses, behavior, being able to interpret smells and balancing the hypothalamus (the hormone center of the brain).

Different smells route to different areas of the brain because different responses may be required. For example, a smell, which triggers a memory, would be routed to one location, while a smell, which requires immediate physical reaction, such as the scent of burning, would go to another area of the brain. The human brain can distinguish between a number of types of smells and related smells because the sense of smell is the only sense that bypasses the cerebral cortex goes directly to the limbic system, which is one of the fastest ways to achieve beneficial psychological or physiological effects. More importantly, because essential oils are so complex they will not disturb the body's natural balance or homeostasis: if one constituent exerts too strong an effect another constituent may block or counteract it. It's almost as if they carry the power of intelligence once they enter your system.

As aroma molecules emitted from sources such as aromatherapy essential oils, balms and bath salts continue their journey they send a signals to the central nervous system, which in turn will further stimulate the secretion of neurotransmitters, endorphins, hormones, and enzymes. When the healing molecules enter the blood stream they will go where needed, support whatever body systems are out of balance by, reducing the damage caused by chronic stress.

The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine conducted a study “Physical & Psychological Effects of Aromatherapy – Inhalation on Pregnant Women: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Objectives: Stress reduction care is important for pregnant women to decrease obstetric complications and children’s health problems after birth. The aim is to clarify the physical and psychological effects of inhalation aromatherapy on pregnant women. The essential oils used Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*); Petitgrain (*Citrus aurantium*); Bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*); because these oils are high in linalool and linalyl acetate.

This study clarified that 5 minutes of aromatherapy inhalation promotes a patient’s physical and psychological well-being. Results of the trial showed that inhalation aromatherapy was improving the temporary mood on the Tension-Anxiety and Anger-Hostility scales. Therefore, it is believed to potentially become a useful treatment in the future.

The best way to inhale the oil is place a couple of drops on a tissue or cotton ball. The next easiest and far more potent inhalation method is to put a few drops in a diffuser. The effects of the oils are strong and immediate. Try this with pure, high quality Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) and your sinuses will be clearer than you have ever imagined. Put a drop or two of Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*) on a cotton ball and place in your lingerie drawers. Give your personals that sweet floral aroma. At night, a drop of lavender on a tissue and place it near your pillow to help you to relax, calm you down and aide in a good night’s rest. All of these methods can be used during pregnancy.

The safe and gentle way to enjoy and benefit from essential oils during pregnancy, labor, or postpartum period is to diffuse a small amount of oil throughout the room via inhalation, which allows them to be absorbed into the lungs and provide systemic benefits. Because with this method, you are not physically applying the essential oils to your body, there are very few limits to the range of oils you can safely use. Below is a list of various diffusing methods.

Common methods of diffusing include:

Aroma lamps - the upper reservoir is filled with water and several drops of essential oils. The heat disperses oil from a tea light underneath.

Light bulb rings - several drops of essential oils are placed in a ceramic ring that is then placed around a light bulb. The heat of the light bulb diffuses the oil.

Fan diffusers - drops of oil are placed on pads that are inserted into the fan diffuser. The breeze from the fan wafts the scent throughout the room.

Nebulizers - air is blown through a glass vial that is filled with a small amount of essential oil, filling the room with your chosen aroma. The best diffuser for the therapeutic benefits of the oils is a nebulizer, which uses “cold diffusion”.

More and more, pregnant women and new parents are looking for natural alternatives.

Although conventional medicine can be helpful in certain cases, a natural alternative like inhalation of essential oil proves to be just as effective, if not more so, for common ailments associated with childbirth and parenting. Below are a few essential oils that can help with a more natural pregnancy and childbirth.

The essential oils of Neroli (*Citrus aurantium*) and Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) can be used to help with fear and anxiety during labor. If you have a long labor and your feeling fatigue setting in, the essential oils of Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) and Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) can be used for energy or alertness. Also during a long labor, misting your face with the hydrosols of lavender, neroli, or Rose (*Rosa damascena*) will refresh you.

During labor, your labor partner can massage your lower back with the essential oils of Chamomile (Roman – *Anthemis nobilis* and/or German – *Matricaria chamomilla*), Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*), and/or Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) in a base of carrier oil, 12 drops per oz. of carrier oil.

Essential Oil Therapy during pregnancy:

- can help deal with stress and promote relaxation and calming
- can ease anxiety and fear
- can help you keep in tune with your body and your baby
- can aid in ‘recovery’ after childbirth

While on one hand inhalation of essential oils for the most part is safe to use there are still precautions that need to be taken into account. Below is a summary of some of the essential oils you can diffuse during pregnancy as well as some of their benefits and precautions:

Bergamot (*Citrus Bergamia*)- Calming; Not for use in bath; Not for sensitive skin- may be irritant and need to be applied diluted; Phototoxic; includes sunlamps and tanning beds;

Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) - muscular pain, labor, morning sickness, perineum healing – Not for long term use with history of estrogen dependent cancer; ragweed allergy

Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*) - muscular pain, headaches, labor – Not for low blood pressure; Not for long term use with history of estrogen dependent cancer; May increase narcotic effect of drinking alcohol & over use can cause headaches

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) - muscular pain, headaches, labor, stress, perineum healing - Not use with low blood pressure; can use during third trimester on; use in moderation and low dilution (1% or less). Safe to use in a low dilution with children.

Lemon (*Citrus limon*) - may cause dermal irritation, good for nausea & vomiting; Phototoxic; includes sunlamps and tanning beds; Not for use in the bath; Safe entire pregnancy; use in moderation and low dilution (1% or less).

Neroli (*Citrus aurantium*) - anxiety, depression, and hysteria.

Peppermint – (*Mentha piperita*) headaches, morning sickness, nausea, alertness – Avoid contact with eyes, mucus membranes, sensitive skin, or fresh wounds or burns; do not apply on infants younger than 18 months

Petitgrain (*Citrus aurantium*) – not for sensitive skin – may be an irritant and need to be diluted; good for anxiety, insomnia

Rose (*Rosa damascena*) – Not for children under 5; Can use during the third trimester of pregnancy in moderation; not for long term use with history of estrogen dependent cancer; Generally non-toxic, non-irritating and non-sensitizing; Not for long term use with history of estrogen dependent cancer.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) – good for anxiety, headaches, depression; Not for children under 5; Not for use in bath; Not for long term use with history of estrogen dependent cancer; Avoid if you have high blood pressure; use in moderation and low dilution.

There are known precautions when using essential oils during pregnancy and on babies, however, the safest is by diffusion, with that being the avenue of very little risk. Generally, the inhalation of flowers and citrus oils can be considered safe for use throughout the entire pregnancy. So I say, “Diffuse away!”

There are many essential oils that are not recommended for use during the first trimester if you are using them topically, such as rose, jasmine and chamomile. You should consult with a certified aromatherapist to be sure.

In closing, I would like to say that the process of inhalation is the most powerful of all senses. The inhalation of flowers, plant materials and aromatic plant oils, including essential oils, and other aromatic compounds for the purpose of altering one's mood, cognitive, psychological or physical wellbeing is a natural way to go about life. As we all know an aroma can take you back, move you about thru time and make adjustments to your emotions at any given moment. I believe in the healing powers of essential oils via inhalation and topically. From the articles and information I have read it seems essential oils are safer and more effective than some of today's medicines. And why wouldn't they be; they were used years and years ago when there wasn't all this modern medicine. In my opinion essential oils information needs to be incorporated and distributed with the information on the traditional/conventional medicines.

See <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24829772> for a study conducted on nausea, vomiting, physical and psychological effects of inhalation of essential oils which proved to be successful in combating some basic issues during pregnancy.

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