

# Essential oils and pregnancy

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Essential oils can be used for many things, and they're starting to be used more by pregnant women around the world. Essential oils are natural oils that are obtained by distillation and have a characteristic fragrance derived from a plant or other source.

"Oils can be used for a variety of ailments," says Emily Sisco, certified nurse midwife at Mayo Clinic Health System. "They are becoming more common to use during pregnancy, labor and postpartum to treat anxiety, aches and lack of focus."

Sisco says there are many essential [oils](#) from which to choose, but she offers two that may help [pregnant women](#):

Peppermint. Some women have had success managing headaches in pregnancy with [peppermint oil](#). Peppermint oil also can be helpful for nausea, nasal congestion and muscle aches. Peppermint oil inhalation has even been found to be helpful for postpartum women who have difficulty emptying their bladder.

Lavender and rose. Studies have found lavender and rose essential oils can decrease anxiety in labor. A woman's perception of pain also can decrease when she is relaxed. Because the sense of smell is strongly linked with memory, if you've experienced relaxation with the smell of lavender or rose in the past, inhaling it during labor likely will help you recall those relaxing experiences.

"I personally have used many essential oils, but my favorite is lavender," says Sisco. "I use [lavender](#) oil mixed with water in a spray bottle on my pillow to promote restful sleep. This technique might be especially helpful for postpartum moms."

Want to try them?

If you are pregnant and would like to try essential oils, Sisco asks you to consider the following:

- Like many things, more is not necessarily better. Pregnant women should start with one drop of their chosen essential oil and increase up to three to five drops based on their tolerance. Pregnancy can increase sensitivity to smell, and some women can find aromatherapy overwhelming. It may even trigger symptoms, such as nausea. Try placing the oil on a tissue or cotton ball for inhalation, which can easily be removed if not tolerated well.
- Avoid placing it on your skin. Oils often require a carrier oil, such as coconut or almond oil, to dilute the oil and avoid skin irritation. A qualified aromatherapist can give more details regarding preparation of specific oils.
- Do not ingest essential oils during pregnancy. There isn't enough research to support this is safe for your baby.

"Even though I use essential oils, the research is still limited, and it is best to speak with your medical provider first," adds Sisco.

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