

Aromatherapy use and safety: What to know about essential oils during pregnancy

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People often have questions about using essential oils before, during and after pregnancy. These natural oils are distilled from plants or other sources and retain their characteristic fragrance. Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of essential oils, but research on its effectiveness is limited. Some studies have shown that aromatherapy may relieve anxiety and depression.

The Food and Drug Administration doesn't regulate [essential oils](#) used for aromatherapy, but they have been shown to be safe when used as directed. Essential oils are becoming more common to use during [pregnancy](#), labor and the [postpartum period](#) to treat anxiety, aches and lack of focus.

With various oils to choose from, these types may help pregnant people:

Peppermint oil

Peppermint oil can be helpful for headaches, nausea, [nasal congestion](#) and muscle aches during pregnancy. Peppermint oil inhalation has even been found to be beneficial for postpartum people who have difficulty emptying their bladder.

Lavender and rose oils

Studies have found that [lavender](#) and rose essential oils can decrease anxiety in labor. A person's perception of pain also can decrease when they're relaxed. The sense of smell is strongly linked with memory. If you've experienced relaxation with the scent of lavender or rose in the past, inhaling it during [labor](#) likely will help you recall those relaxing experiences.

Some studies show that lavender oil aromatherapy may improve sleep

for people who are in the hospital. The oil can be mixed with water and sprayed on a pillow to promote restful sleep. This technique might be beneficial for postpartum people as well.

Want to try essential oil?

If you're pregnant and would like to try essential oils, here are some points to consider:

- More is not necessarily better. I recommend that pregnant people start with one drop of their chosen essential oil and increase it to three to five drops based on their tolerance. Pregnancy can increase sensitivity to smell, and some people 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 you don't tolerate the fragrance.
- Avoid placing essential oils on your skin. Essential oils often require a carrier oil, such as coconut or almond oil, to dilute them. Essential oils applied directly to the skin can cause side effects, such as [allergic reactions](#), irritation or sun sensitivity. A qualified aromatherapist can give more details for preparing specific oils.
- Don't ingest essential oils during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. There isn't enough research to support that this is safe for your baby.

Since the research on essential oils for aromatherapy is limited, talk with your health care team if you're considering aromatherapy while pregnant or breastfeeding.

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