



# Vicki Hobbs

PREGNANCY, BIRTH & POSTPARTUM COACH

## Aromatherapy in Pregnancy, Labour, Birth & Postpartum



Written by Vicki Hobbs ©

## Aromatherapy For Pregnancy

There is so much to write about Aromatherapy; however this is just a very basic overview of aromatherapy in pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period highlighting the important things to help mums and their birth partners understand how they can use essential oils confidently and safely.

Aromatherapy is the use of 100% pure essential oils, which have been extracted from roots, leaves, flowers, bark or stems of the plant.

They are not to be confused with fragrance oils that have no therapeutic benefits at all except to smell nice.

Essential oils have the power to rejuvenate your mind, body, emotions and spirit. It is based on the ancient practice of using essential oils to heal by “therapeutically” stimulating the olfactory senses, mental responses, circulatory and respiratory functions.

Aromatherapy provides benefits from stress and anxiety leading up to conception, through your whole pregnancy, during labour and birth and well into the postnatal period and beyond. Essential oils provide you with a positive sensory environment for birth especially if you do not like the smell of hospitals. Plant essences stimulate sensory cells in the nose, which send chemical messages to the limbic area of the brain, which cause neurochemicals to be released into the bloodstream.

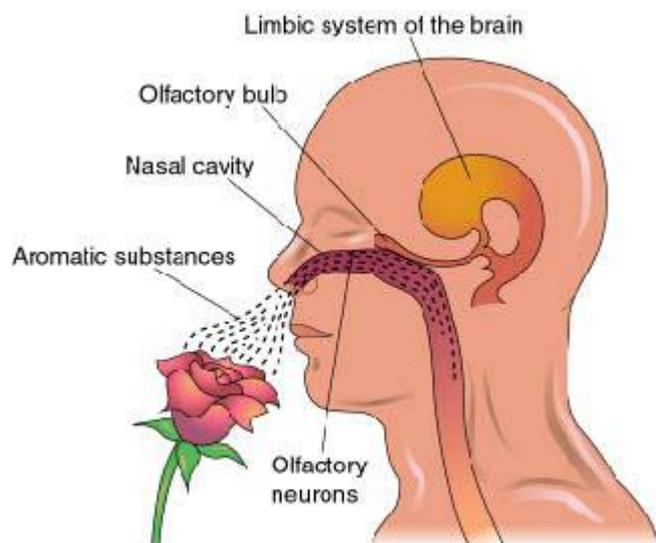
These essences are energising and stimulate the release of endorphins, which are your body’s natural healing hormones so you may be less likely to use pain medication.

As you inhale essential oils, notice how your breathing becomes slow and full, while when you are experiencing fear or anxiety your breathing will be short and rapid.

A study at Oxford Brookes University during 1990–98 looked at the effects that essential oils can have on a mother to help her cope mentally with labour and more deeply relax into that trance like state.

During the eight-year study involving 8,000 mothers, they found that aromatherapy was effective in managing labour pains and using essential oils reduced maternal anxiety and fear while helping to give a sense of overall well-being.

Fear and anxiety are two emotions which can slow or stall labour or make the labouring mother unable to cope with the pain of labour. The study showed a drop in the use of opiate pain relief by those mothers who used aromatherapy during labour. The normal



uptake of opiate pain relief would have been expected to be 30% in the Oxford study this dropped to 0.4%.

The oils that were used included: Lavender, Clary Sage, Frankincense, Rose, Jasmine, Eucalyptus, Peppermint, Lemon, Mandarin and the methods of practice used were massage, added to baths and foot baths and then as drops on the forehead and palms of the hand.



There has been a lot of negative publicity about using essential oils during pregnancy.

Franzesca Watson is one of the world's leading authorities on aromatherapy. She is the founder and principal for the International School of Aromatherapy. She writes in her book titled Aromatherapy Blends and Remedies that *"it is important to be aware of the potential hazards when essential oils are used inappropriately, particularly if using the more powerful oils such as pennyroyal and sage, however when essential oils are used topically in low doses and not ingested the threat to pregnancy is minimal."*

Ms Watson also states that *"the use of essential oils during pregnancy is safer than some medicinal drugs, household chemicals and environmental factors surrounding pregnant women."*

Many of the reasons given for not using essential oils in pregnancy are based on myths, misinformation and lack of education. There is also a lack of understanding of how the body works in pregnancy. There are some oils that should not be used but most of these are not readily available anyway.

Some oils are considered to be 'emmenagogues' which stimulate blood flow in the pelvic area and uterus and stimulate menstruation.

Oils such as Mugwort have been used to cause an abortion or prevent pregnancy however these would have had to be used in extremely high doses and ingested daily for long periods of time.

Many women are advised not to use lavender during the first trimester, however it is only "spike lavender" taken internally that may be a concern as lavender is not a

uterine stimulant according to Robert Tisserand, who is a researcher, world expert and advisor on aromatherapy and essential oils.

His website is <http://roberttisserand.com/> and he is an excellent resource and advisor for safety when using essential oils.

Tisserand also confirms that Rose essential oil can be used during all stages of pregnancy as it is a uterine relaxant and helps the ligaments to soften, enabling the pelvic bones to expand, and also to regain elasticity after birth.

There is no sound evidence for you not to use Rose essential oil during all stages of pregnancy. Turkish women spend many hours picking rose flowers for distillation and enjoy using rose oil in massage daily and consider it to be highly beneficial for pregnant women.

Due to my previous training where rose essential oil was listed as an emmenagogue I also contacted Robert Tisserand personally to ask his advice on using rose essential oils with pregnant women and this is what he had to say: *“There's no evidence that rose oil stimulates menstruation. Even if there was, this would not mean a contraindication in pregnancy because menstruation and abortion are totally different.”*



According to the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy *“a common myth in aromatherapy is that massage oils containing essential oils such as Clary Sage, Rose or even Rosemary can cause a miscarriage and hence should be avoided throughout pregnancy. Authors such as Ron Guba, Kurt Schnaubelt, and Chrissie Wildwood have all pointed out that there have been ‘no recorded cases of miscarriage or birth defect resulting from aromatherapy massage using therapeutic applications of any essential oil.’”*

However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that essential oils do penetrate the body after application, no matter how you use the oil.

Medical professionals and herbalists will always exercise caution with drug administration and herbal remedies during pregnancy, therefore a degree of caution is also warranted when using essential oils, as not enough is known about their pharmacodynamics (the physiological effects on the body) and their pharmacokinetics (how they move through the body – absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion).

There is also not enough information about the effects of ingesting oils (taken orally).

Traditional teachings advocate that therapists do not prescribe the administering of essential oils orally. All cases of death due to essential oils have been attributed to internal use. It is increasingly easier to overdose when taking oils internally.



A study in Germany showed that essential oils can be detected in your mouth just 20 minutes after application to your feet. When they are absorbed so readily, there is no reason to take them internally.

Well known researcher and advisor of aromatherapy Ron Guba wrote the article "Toxicity Myths – The Actual Risks of Essential Oil Use" and it became the most published paper ever in Aromatherapy. In his article he wrote *"the oral ingestion of an essential oil is generally both fully and rapidly absorbed into the portal blood circulation. However, all other types of applications do not represent the same level of absorption and dosage."*

When you are considering massage with you and your partner or support person, we recommend that you use 25ml of carrier oil or cream and add a total of 10 – 12 drops in total of 100% pure essential oils to make a blend for massage.



In this booklet I give you a list of oils that are all safe to use in pregnancy but it is wise to do a skin patch test first, especially if you have sensitive skin.

Simply apply some of the diluted oil or blend on the inside of your arm, and wait to see if you have any reaction. If the area becomes red or itchy, rub some vegetable oil over the area and don't use those essential oils again.

You could try pinpointing which oil you are sensitive to by doing a patch test with each oil individually again blended with carrier oil.

It is not uncommon for pregnant women to develop hypersensitive skin issues, so skin reactions may occur.

With skin application of essential oils chronic toxicity requires regular use at high volumes over long periods of time (with the exception of Wintergreen and Sweet Birch).

With inhalation, chronic toxicity could occur if someone were to sit in an unventilated room everyday using a diffuser constantly with high doses of essential oils.

## Diffusing and Vaporising

There is a lot of confusion around the safe diffusing of essential oils and the use of traditional oil “burners” (vaporisers).

It is not just about the smell.

Essential oils are made up of chemicals – even chemicals found in nature can have adverse effects on the mind and body, so you must give your body a rest from exposure to allow it to process and filter out those chemicals.

The olfactory receptor cells in your nose become saturated after 20 – 30 minutes of diffusing, and this causes your sense of smell to turn off.

You don't smell it anymore, but the molecules are still there in the air, and you are still breathing them in and they are still influencing your body.

If you were to leave the room and go outside to open your olfactory system again, and then walked back into the room where the diffuser is then you will again start smelling the essential oils.

Sometimes because you think you can't smell the oils anymore you top up with more essential oils, and in effect you are at risk of “overdosing” with the use of the diffuser.

Being in a birth suite usually means you are in a small and not very well-ventilated area, therefore the use of a diffuser or vaporizer in that room for long periods of time could have an adverse effect on the labouring woman.

You also need to be cautious about the risks of sensitisation, which increases with longer periods of exposure and more frequent use, even at safe dosages.

The therapeutic benefits of the oils are at their best within that 20-30-minute time frame.

Once that therapeutic benefit has been reached, you are then at risk of being over exposed to the oils, which may then create adverse reactions such as headaches, dizziness, nausea, disorientation, fogginess and other symptoms.



It is important to give your body a break from exposure to essential oils, and Robert Tisserand suggests: *“Don’t diffuse for long periods of time – 30 to 60 minutes is a good length or 30 minutes on then 60 minutes off. This is because our body, especially our nervous system habituates after this length of time. With continuous diffusion, while benefits do not increase, there is evidence that the body becomes stressed in various other ways.”*

I prefer women to use an essential oil spray mist bottle.



Prepare your spray to use during your relaxation sessions during pregnancy, and then take it with you to use during labour.

100ml – Carrier Oil – up to 50 drops in total of essential oils (guide only).

I start off using less then add more drops if I need them.

10 drops Lavender  
10 drops Lime  
10 drops Wild Orange  
5 drops Rose Geranium  
5 drops Marjoram  
5 drops Vanilla

## ESSENTIAL OILS CONSIDERED SAFE TO USE DURING PREGNANCY

The following essential oils have been listed by the '*International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists*' as being safe to use during pregnancy, in the correct low doses (as described on the previous page).

BENZOIN
BERGAMOT
BLACK PEPPER
CHAMOMILE GERMAN
CHAMOMILE ROMAN
CLARY SAGE – from 37 weeks
CYPRESS
EUCALYPTUS
FRANKINCENSE
GINGER
GRAPEFRUIT
GERANIUM
JUNIPER
LAVENDER
LEMON
LEMONGRASS
MANDARIN
MARJORAM SWEET
NEROLI
PETITGRAIN
ROSE OTTO
SANDALWOOD
SWEET ORANGE
PATCHOULI
SANDALWOOD
TANGERINE
TEA TREE
YLANG YLANG

## CARRIER OR BASE OILS TO USE WITH ESSENTIAL OILS



As oil penetrates the skin it makes sense to use the best quality and least processed oils, such as using organic, cold pressed and virgin wherever possible. It is important to select carrier oils, creams or lotions which are not made of mineral oils as these are petroleum-based products and are not beneficial for the skin and may deplete it of Vitamin D.

It is also important to select lotions, which do not contain perfumes.

Many therapists prefer not to use a nut carrier oil to avoid allergies, however research is not conclusive to support this caution as allergies are more linked to peanuts, and there are some lovely nut oils such as macadamia, almond, hazelnut, kukui and walnut.

Wheatgerm oil is rich in fatty acids and has the highest content of vitamin E of any of the plant oils, and so will be effective in nourishing the skin and helps minimise the appearance of stretch marks. Rosehip seed oil has become very popular in massage for its wound-healing abilities and wrinkle prevention. It has high levels of the essential fatty acids including Omega 3 and 6 as well as Vitamin C.

Wheatgerm and Rosehip Oils can be combined to make a beautiful blend. There are so many different types of carrier oils that you can use to blend with your essential oils.

A very luxurious carrier oil to use during pregnancy is the Camellia Oil (or Tea Seed Oil). Geishas in Japan use Camellia Oil regularly to keep their beautiful skin soft and supple. This very precious and luxurious oil has been recognised for centuries in Eastern Asia for its highly restorative and rejuvenating effect on the skin. Camellia Oil is rapidly absorbed and is also high in fatty acids, Vitamins A, B, and E and other skin soothing minerals.

It also possesses a unique active constituent known as 'squalene' which is an important component of the skin's natural emollient system.

## ESSENTIAL OILS FOR LABOUR AND BIRTH

The aroma of essential oils helps to reduce anxiety during labour. The benefits are increased if the labouring mum has been using the essential oils for relaxation and stress management prenatally as she would have already conditioned her subconscious mind to the smell promoting relaxation.

The trigger for relaxation through aroma will also help to release endorphins, therefore reducing the intensity of pain felt during labour and birth.

**NOTE - Essential oils should not be used in a birth pool or bath during birth as a newborn surfaces the water with their eyes open and therefore the essential oils could irritate their eyes or their new sensitive skin.**

### CLARY SAGE ESSENTIAL OIL

Clary Sage is a plant native to Italy, Syria and Southern France and grows in dry soil. The essential oil is distilled from the flowers and flowering tips.

It is recommended that Clary Sage only be used from 37 weeks onwards. It may be used to facilitate labour if the body is ready to go into labour.

It may stimulate the release of oxytocin in pregnant women; therefore it is highly recommended for use during labour to help contractions to intensify and become more effective in pulling up the horizontal uterine muscles to open the cervix and move baby down into the pelvis and into the birth canal.



**Research shows that when a woman smells clary sage this can increase the levels of oxytocin, however it did not show an increase in contraction levels. The research also showed that there was an increase in pain relief for women who used clary sage.**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5721455>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11033651>

The simplest and most common way to use Clary Sage during labour is to put a few drops onto a dry cloth or flannel and mum will inhale the aroma when she needs it to help herself become calmer and more relaxed during contractions.

A great way to use Clary Sage essential oil is to soak a few cotton balls in the oil and put them under the pregnant mums' pillow. The aroma will eventually make its way through to the mums' olfactory system and will have many benefits such as relaxation, reducing muscle tension while calming the nerves.

You can also put 20 drops of Clary Sage oil in 50ml carrier oil and massage gently around the abdomen, hips, lower back and pelvis. This blend can be rubbed onto the feet and palms of women in labour or if they are waiting to go into labour. This is a great way of introducing the oil into the body. Clary Sage oil can also be added to a bath for a relaxing soak.

Essential oils that form a beautiful synergy for massage during labour and birth are:

- **Rose** – Is a uterine relaxant and helps the ligaments to soften, enabling the pelvic bones to expand, and also to regain elasticity after the birth.
- **Neroli** – Works on the nervous system and facilitates easy breathing, especially during labour. Its calming effect increases the oxygen supply to the blood and brain and helps the woman to avoid hyperventilation.
- **Lavender** – Helps to stimulate the circulation and has a very calming effect on the mother.
- **Clary Sage** – This essential oil facilitates birth and helps breathing by calming the lower part of the spinal cord. It may create more effective contractions, and helps labour to progress well when you put a few drops on your labour focus points (see diagrams). You can also try this as a natural way to induce labour – remembering that your body needs to be ready to go into labour. It can also be used to reduce pain and aid in circulation.

Other oils that have been recommended by midwives and aromatherapists to use during labour and birth include:

BERGAMOT
CHAMOMILE ROMAN
CLARY SAGE
EUCALYPTUS
GRAPEFRUIT
JASMINE
LEMON
MANDARIN
MARJORAM SWEET
ROSEMARY
SPEARMINT
YLANG YLANG

## MAKING YOUR OWN

So to give you an example of how easy it is to use essential oils for massage during labour, you could make up your own.

Just use 100ml of carrier oil made from camellia seed, grapeseed, sunflower, canola, apricot or jojoba oil and add the following pure essential oils to make a beautiful, relaxing blend:

100ml – Carrier Oil – up to 50 drops in total of essential oils (guide only).  
I start off using less then add more drops if I need them.

10 drops Clary Sage  
10 drops Lavender  
10 drops Neroli  
10 drops Rose

Not only can you use these essential oils while having a massage, they can also be used in a bath, oil vaporiser, diffuser, compress or spray bottle (use one drop of each essential oil).

Please note that your sense of smell is acute during pregnancy therefore it is suggested that you use less drops of essential oils compared to what you would use if you were not pregnant.



## OILS THAT ARE PHOTOTOXIC

Oils that are phototoxic are also referred to as 'photo sensitive', and this refers to constituents in the essential oil that absorb sunlight, which then increases the effect of the sun on your skin.

These oils shouldn't be used in any sort of application where the essential oil will stay on your skin and be exposed to the sun for a long period of time, such as going out to the beach and sunbaking.

Bergamot is perhaps the most well-known phototoxic essential oil. Other cold pressed (not steam distilled) citrus essential oils (like lemon or lime) can be phototoxic as well. But folded oils, such as Wild Orange have had much of the terpenes removed, so they are much less phototoxic.

ANGELICA ROOT
BERGAMOT
BITTER ORANGE
CASSIA
CUMIN
GINGER
GRAPEFRUIT
LEMON
LIME
MANDARIN
TANGERINE



## ESSENTIAL OILS NOT TO USE DURING PREGNANCY

The following oils should not be used at all, regardless of whether the client is pregnant or not, but they are not readily available from suppliers anyway:

SASSAFRAS
WORMWOOD
CASSIA
PENNYROYAL
MUSTARD
ELECAMPANE

Care should be taken with oils that contain high levels of phenols, ethers and aromatic aldehydes, as they can irritate the skin due to their molecular shape. This list is not exhaustive but gives an idea as to the types of oils that should not be used during pregnancy.

ANISEED	OREGANO
ANISE STAR	PARSLEY
BASIL	PEPPERMINT
BIRCH	ROSEMARY
CAMPHOR	SAGE
CLOVE	SWEET BIRCH
CINNAMON	TANSY
CUMIN	TARRAGON
FENNEL	THUJA
HYSSOP	THYME
JUNIPER	WINTERGREEN
MUGWORT	WORMWOOD



## LABOUR FOCUS POINTS

There are some pressure points that are very powerful that may help to speed things up if labour has slowed or is prolonged and to also reduce the intensity of pain. Clary Sage oil can also be placed on these points and then apply pressure to stimulate contractions.

### SPLEEN 6 (SP6)

This point is often used by non-pregnant women for easing period pains because it regulates earth energies and has a strong effect on muscle tension. This point can help to stimulate contractions, ease pain

Place the tip of your little finger on top of the point of the ankle bone (malleolus), fingers pointing to the front of the leg. SP6 will then be beneath the second joint of your forefinger, under the shin bone (tibia).



### LIVER (LV3)

This point can be used any time during labour and is also good to support the flow of energy in the second stage so you can birth your baby. Working the point may help release tension in the shoulders and neck and is helpful for headaches, which can be common in labour, and is often useful if the mother finds pressure on her neck and shoulder points too intense.

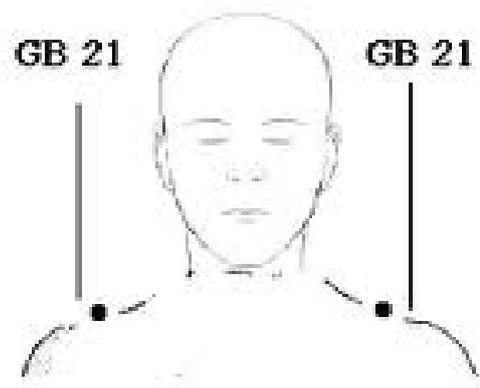
This point lies on top of the foot between the first and second toes, one-and-a-half to two thumb-widths back from the margin of the web.



### GALL BLADDER 21 (GB21)

Pressure on this point can be incorporated into a shoulder massage to relax tension in the shoulder, neck and jaw and to help with the opening of the mouth and the perineum during second stage labour. Because it is linked with the release of oxytocin – the hormone involved in the third stage – this point is particularly good to help with the release of the placenta.

The point lies in the hollow on top of the shoulder, straight up from the nipple when you are standing. It is in the highest point of the muscle of the shoulder.



### **LARGE INTESTINE (LI4)**

This point is known as the “great eliminator” and is often used to relieve pain.

This can be especially useful if the mother is feeling sick or has diarrhoea, which is often the case leading up to labour and even during labour itself. It is also good for headaches.

It is situated on the back of the hand, between the thumb and forefinger. To locate it, have the thumb and index finger closed and the point is at the highest spot of the muscle.

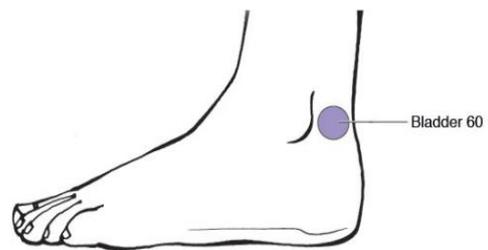


### **BLADDER 60 (BL60)**

This point activates the whole length of the bladder meridian, so it can help ease any tightness in the head, spine and legs.

This is a great point to use when baby is in a posterior position.

The point lies in the hollow midway between the knob of the anklebone on the outside of the ankle and the outer Achilles tendon of the foot.



## POSTNATAL MASSAGE

Postnatal massage is designed to help restore the body to its pre-pregnant condition. It also helps to relieve stress you may be experiencing from carrying and caring for a newborn. It can speed up the recovery by bringing relief of sore muscles and help the mother to relax more easily.

Abdominal massage helps shrink the uterus and relieve scar tissue. It may be given as early as 24 hours after delivery in a vaginal delivery when approved by your doctor or medical practitioner.

It is not uncommon for women to experience “postnatal blues” after the birth of their baby. This can be displayed with mood swings, tearfulness, poor concentration, anxiety, irritation and despondency. Usually this subsides once their milk letdown comes in, usually within 4 days after birth and hormones are more balanced.

Postnatal depression differs in severity and duration. It affects around 10% of women and usually is not evident until after the new mother returns home and can last for several months.

In the tribal world, massage is the most accepted recovery procedure immediately after birth. The abdomen was massaged for the first five days and then intermittently for the next month to help restore the mothers shape. A full body massage offers relief from the aches and pains of muscle soreness, fatigue and promotes rapid healing. It also helps to reduce stress that might prevent milk letdown. A mother can use self-massage to stimulate milk letdown and offer relief in some cases of engorgement.

Essential oils are ideal to use after birth not only because of their antibiotic, antiseptic and disinfectant properties, but because they are emotionally and spiritually uplifting. You can use most essential oils in massage for postnatal care, however the ones that are most uplifting and healing are:

CLARY SAGE
FRANKINCENSE
GERANIUM
GRAPEFRUIT
LAVENDER
MYRRH
NEROLI
PATCHOULI
ROSE

## HEALING AFTER CAESAREAN

One of the best treatments for healing after a caesarean is Calendula-infused oil as it will help the area to heal at a much faster rate. You can continue to use oils and butters to feed and nourish the tissue after the stitches have dissolved, which will also continue to help the scar tissue.

Another way of healing is to gently massage essential oil cream into the caesarean scar – a combination of Bergamot, Lavender, Rose, Roman Chamomile and Tea Tree. This stops it from drying out and itching and helps with the discomfort and healing of the scar.

For example, if you were making this for yourself:

100mls of carrier oil – 50 drops max added

Bergamot – 10 drops

Lavender – 10 drops

Rose – 10 drops

Roman Chamomile – 10 drops

Tea Tree – 10 drops

Frankincense is also a good essential oil to use for scar tissue added to some massage carrier oil.

Massage is a very under-utilised modality for healing of caesarean scars. This can minimise the scar tissue dramatically and prevents that hardening of the adhesion, and should be a necessity for healing – gently to start with using creams as discussed above, and then including the caesarean scar regularly in postnatal massage. It encourages blood circulation and promotes lymph drainage away from the area as well.

Arnica is also a natural anti-inflammatory that you can use on your wound when it is “stinging”.

Reiki over the wound and surrounding area can really help speed up the healing process. It may also help to balance your hormones and promote ongoing healing.



Go for regular walks as this will increase endorphins (healing hormones) through the body as well as circulation.

In the first few weeks you must support your tummy muscles as they are healing so it is really helpful to hold a pillow against your belly while coughing, laughing or sneezing for support.

Don't hunch over, allow your stomach muscles to stretch out while sitting or standing, even though you may feel that they are stretching your wound, it is not, it is actually helping with healing. You will have more problems if you continually have a hunched over posture.

Rest and relaxation – everything can wait. Accept any help and support from others when offered. Don't feel too proud to accept help.

Drinking peppermint tea (the herb is different to using peppermint essential oil) in the first few weeks helps with bowel movements, keeps them soft and easy to push out so you are not straining against the wound.

Drinking lots of water and eating fresh, organic fruit to help with regular bowel movements which are not hard, but not runny.

Diet is really important, but some of the top anti-inflammatory food sources that are beneficial are salmon, blueberries, turmeric, ginger, garlic, green tea, sweet potato and cruciferous vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, bok-choy, broccoli and other green leafy vegetables.



## **WHEN IN DOUBT**

Always check with your aromatherapist or natural therapist if you are unsure of anything regarding natural remedies, herbs and essential oils.

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