

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Using aromatherapy in pregnancy and labour

What is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy uses essential oils extracted from plants to support relaxation, comfort, and wellbeing. In maternity care, aromatherapy is used as a complementary therapy alongside standard care.

What are the benefits?

Aromatherapy may help to:

- Reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.
- Support coping during labour.
- Improve rest and sleep.
- Ease minor symptoms such as nausea or headaches.
- Enhance your overall birth experience.

Some research suggests aromatherapy may help reduce pain and anxiety during labour, although it does not replace medical pain relief

When can aromatherapy be used?

You may be offered aromatherapy:

- From 37 weeks of pregnancy onwards.
- During early and established labour.
- After birth to support recovery.

Your midwife will check it is safe for you before use.

How is aromatherapy used?

Your midwife may use aromatherapy in different ways:

- **Massage**

Oils are diluted and applied to the skin (e.g. back, shoulders).

- **Inhalation**

A few drops on a tissue or cotton wool to breathe in.

- **Bath or footbath**

Oils are diluted and added to water.

- **Compress**

Warm or cool cloth applied to the body.

Important safety information

Aromatherapy is safe when used correctly, but:

- 'Natural' does not always mean safe.
- Oils must never be swallowed.
- Oils must always be diluted before use on the skin.
- Aromatherapy must not be used on or near babies.
- Some oils are not suitable in certain medical conditions.

Aromatherapy must always be used:

- Under the guidance of a trained midwife.
- As a complement to standard maternity care.

When should aromatherapy not be used?

Aromatherapy may not be suitable if:

- You have certain medical or pregnancy conditions.
- You have allergies or sensitivities to oils.
- Labour requires medical management.

Your midwife will discuss this with you.

Using aromatherapy at home

If using aromatherapy at home:

- Use small amounts only (usually one to two drops of essential oil).
- Avoid mixing multiple oils or therapies.
- Ensure good ventilation.
- Do not use diffusers continuously.
- Avoid exposure for babies, children, or unwell individuals.
- Stop using oils if you feel unwell.

Oils bought online or from non-reputable sources may not be safe or pure. Always speak to your midwife if you are unsure.

Your choice

Aromatherapy is optional. You can:

- Accept or decline at any time.
- Choose which oils you prefer.
- Stop use at any point.

When to contact your midwife

Contact your maternity unit if:

- Contractions become regular and strong.
- Your waters break.

- You notice bleeding.
- Your baby's movements change or reduce.
- You feel unwell or have concerns.
- Something doesn't feel right.
- You simply need advice or reassurance.

Further information:

- NHS website: www.nhs.uk
- Speak to your midwife.

Important

This leaflet is for information only and does not replace advice from your midwife or doctor.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns, or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office Leaflet code: PIL202605-01-APL Created: May 2026 / Review Date: May 2028
