

NUTRITIVE AND HERBAL HELP

preconception, pregnancy, postpartum and breastfeeding

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The following herbs are safe and beneficial to use at all times in the childbearing year. They can be used alone or in combination.

Peppermint, lemon grass and lemon verbena may be added to improve or vary the taste.

Alfalfa – *Medicago Sativa*

Use dry as tea or eat the live green sprouts. High in many vitamins and minerals especially vitamin K. Good hemorrhage prevention.

Nettle, *Urtica dioica*

High in calcium, iron, vitamins A, C, D, and K. Supports kidneys. Due to high calcium content reduces leg cramps, muscle spasms and to a certain extent pain during labor and after birth. High vitamin K and iron content help reduce risk of postpartum hemorrhage. Supportive in diminishing hemorrhoids.

Oats, Oatstraw, *Avena*, *Avena stive*, *A. fatua*

Can be taken as tincture, as tea or eaten! In all forms nourishes the nervous system. Tea and grain high in calcium and silica, promotes strong bones, teeth, hair and nails. Useful for hemorrhoids and varicose veins because it strengthens capillaries.

Red Clover, *Trifolium pretense*

High in many vitamins and protein. Contains almost every trace mineral. Aids in iron absorption. Balances the acid/alkaline level in the body. Extremely useful for promoting fertility.

Red Raspberry, *Rubus idaeus*, *R stringosus*

The "herb Supreme" for pregnant woman. High in many vitamins and minerals especially calcium and iron. Tones and firms the pelvic muscles and serves to regulate the action of the uterus. This action is useful in preventing miscarriages and hemorrhages, bringing down the placenta and speeding postpartum involution. Appropriate for use throughout pregnancy. Increases fertility in men and women.

Herbs for common complaints of pregnancy

Anemia – Eat or drink nettle, dandelion, yellow dock, kelp, parsley, chives, wheat grass, red raspberry and dark green leafy vegetables. Feridex liquid iron or KM will usually work when all else fails. Vitamin C enhances iron absorption. Avoid coffee, black tea, chocolate and soda as caffeine inhibits iron absorption.

Constipation – Most herbal laxatives are too strong to take during pregnancy. Psyllium seeds, prunes, and prune juice, molasses, slippery elm, fennel and flax are all gentle and safe. A woman experiencing constipation should also eat a lot of bran found in unrefined grains and vegetables drink plenty of water and get enough exercise.

Gestational Diabetes – Along with controlling sugar intake in the diet, prickly pear pads (also called nopalitos) can be eaten to lower blood sugar. Blueberry leaves are also useful in lowering blood sugar levels. Take one or two cups of tea a day.

Headaches – Plenty of rest, water, and stable blood sugar will take care of most headaches in pregnancy. Calcium will also help. Herbs high in calcium include greens such as amaranth, lambs quarters, borage, dandelion, mustard, burdock, kelp, parsley, oatstraw, mallows, watercress, nettles, these can be eaten fresh or drunk as tea when dried. Hops, skullcap and catnip can be mixed and taken as tea or in capsules and taken 1 – 2 times a day. Peppermint oil rubbed into temples is also effective.

Heartburn - Eat small meals frequently. Don't drink liquids while eating. Avoid greasy or very spicy foods. Papaya in any form including tablets will help, as will fennel, anise or slippery elm tea.

Hemorrhoids – Drinking plenty of water, not straining when having a bowel movement and doing kegels will help with hemorrhoids. External applications of witch hazel, yarrow, comfrey, mullein, oak bark, and plantain and apple cider vinegar will also help. These can be applied as a sitz bath or swabbed on with a cotton ball. Grated or sliced potato placed on the hemorrhoid is also effective. A comfrey / St. John's wort salve can be quite soothing. Also try a poultice of green clay mixed with water or witch hazel. See varicose Veins for internal support.

High Blood pressure – avoid stimulants and reduce stress. Eat plenty of cucumbers (1 a day), garlic, onions and lime juice. Ginger, hawthorn berry, skullcap or linden flower tea, one or two cups daily. Tinctures of skullcap, passion flower, hawthorn berries or valerian 20 drops, 3X a day.

Itchy skin – internally dandelion can be taken as tea, tincture or food. Parsley, alfalfa and wheatgrass may also be eaten or drunk.

Leg Cramps – Calcium will help, see sources under headaches.

Morning sickness / nausea / vomiting – this can be a tricky problem, one woman might respond well to the first thing you try and another might have to try everything just to find a mediocre remedy. Try one of the following teas: Peppermint, wild yam, peach leaf, ginger root (may also be taken in capsules up to 1g per day) Cinnamon, catnip, spearmint, raspberry leaf, or fennel seed. Also small frequent meals, vitamin B6, crackers at the bedside, ect..

Stretch Marks – rub with oil (olive is great) containing Elder blossoms, comfrey Rosehips, bee pollen, and /or vitamin E.

Threatened Miscarriage – Wild yam 2 – 4 oz of infusion every half hour for up to a day. Results should be seen by second dose. False Unicorn can be used for women who have had repeated miscarriages. Use 3 drops of the tincture 4-5 times a day from a month before conception through the first trimester. 1 – 2 cups of black haw root tea can be drunk from conception through the 1st trimester for women who have had previous miscarriages. Up to 2000 IU vitamin E daily for threatened miscarriage. Also 30 drops of crampbark tincture up to every half hour.

Urinary Tract infections – Three days of lots of water, vitamin C, cranberry and lemon juice should take care of most UTI's. If not, corn silk, rosehips, slippery elm, horsetail, animopsis or uva usi (not for more than 10 days) can be tried. Try each choice for 3 – 5 days, if there are no results, try another one.

Varicose veins - Internally lecithin, rutin (only small amounts in the 1st trimester), vitamins E and C, oatstraw and nettles will support vein and capillary integrity. External applications of witch hazel, yarrow, comfrey, mullein, oak bark, plantain, and apple cider vinegar will also help. Support stockings can help in advanced cases. Avoid hot and spicy foods.

Yeast Infections – Spray, sitz or low pressure douche (douches should be used with care during pregnancy because of the high water pressure) with white oak bark, bayberry, slippery elm, golden seal, chaparral or animopsis tea. Plain live yogurt or acidophilus capsules may be inserted in the vagina. A small or medium sized garlic clove may also be carefully peeled (to avoid nicks) and inserted in the vagina. The clove should be removed and a new one inserted every 12 hours. Yeast loves sugar so, reduce sugar intake – this includes honey, maple syrup, and other natural sweets.

Herbs for Labor

Tea can be made from any of the nutritive / tonic herbs and sipped warm or cold through out labor. Please remember that the baby can be affected by these herbs and to take fetal heart tones often after giving herbs. A slight rise in FHT is often noted and should not be dramatic. If the baby seems to respond poorly to the herbs, discontinue using.

Stalled Labor – Bethroot tincture – Trillium ovatum – ¼ - ½ teaspoon every thirty minutes for up to 3 doses. A smaller dose (20 drops) postpartum can be used for hemorrhage but in this instance, over 30 drops may aggravate the problem.

Black Cohosh – cimicifuga racemosa – This is best used in conjunction with Blue cohosh. 1 dropper full of each every hour.

Blue Cohosh – Caulophyllum thalictroides This is an oxytocic herb and will help bring on regular contractions. 20 drops every hour is a good dose. This herb can be used with black cohosh for better effect. Be aware that it may lower a woman's blood pressure.

Cotton Root bark tincture gossypium - This herb works by providing oxytocin to do it's work in the body. For a stalled or very slow going labor 1 – 2 droppers full can be taken up to every half hour for up to 5 doses. Be careful when harvesting or purchasing this herb because pesticides used to grow non-organic cotton plants are particularly vile.

Rigid cervical OS – Lobelia tincture Lobelia inflata large dosed 60 – 120 drops used 3 times may be used. Women often feel strange after taking this herb, kind of rubbery, just kinda weird, so warn them before hand.

Evening Primrose oil taken internally or rubbed directly on the cervix. This seems to work the best on the tight transitional cervixes 8 cm plus.

Herbs that Help a Woman Relax and Sleep

For those times when its been going on a while or everyone else needs some sleep. Skullcap, St.John's wort, valerian, Hops, catnip, or passionflower can all be used. In combination or alone. Approximately 1 – 2 droppers full for up to three doses.

Postpartum Hemorrhage

Shepherd's Purse – capsella bursa- pastoris many midwives favor this herb for hemorrhages. 1 dropper full under the tongue will quickly stop hemorrhage. The dose can be repeated every minute or so as needed.

Retained Placenta – Angelica and blue cohosh mixed together as a whole dropper full every few minutes. Catnip tea nepeta. This is my favorite remedy. 1 dropper full will usually expel a retained placenta but the dose can be repeated up to 3 times at 5 – 10 minute intervals.

Herbs for Postpartum period

Tears – Arnica in homeopathic doses is appropriate for even women who haven't torn. This herb does wonders on traumatized tissue! It reduces swelling and promotes healing.

A sitz bath – Uva ursi and comfrey leaf are the vital ingredients in this postpartum sitz bath, but any of the following may also be added. Calendula, red Raspberry, witch hazel, oak leaves, manzanita, sage, yarrow, garlic, sea salt. The herbs should be steeped as long as possible (at least 15 minutes and overnight is great). The sitz bath should be as hot as the woman can stand it without scalding of course. The woman should sit in it for at least 15 minutes or for as long as possible.

Aloe vera gel can be applied to lessen pain and promote healing.

Breast Feeding – All the nutritive herbs will promote milk production to a certain extent. For additional help, you can use any of the following galactogens, Fennel, Fenugreek, blessed thistle, borage or hops.

Sore Breasts – A cabbage leaf that has been crushed by hand or rolling pin may be placed on the breast. Change when the leaf gets hot.

A hot compress of fresh or dried comfrey leaves often works.

Engorgement – Sage and parsley will both lessen milk flow and can be used

Chapped Sore nipples – Lanolin, comfrey and calendula salve are all useful. Aloe vera can also be used but must be rinsed off before nursing because it is quite bitter tasting.

Some Herbs to avoid

Agave – Teratogens, (causing abnormal structures in embryo), Emmenagogues

Angelica – Emmenagogues (causes menstrual flow)

Basil – as a tincture, (not a herb you eat). Emmenagogues

Beth Root – Emmenagogues

Black Cohosh – Causes uterine cramping

Blessed Thistle – Can cause gastric upset (O.K. for nursing)

Blood root – Sanguine (increases blood circulation, burns)

Blue Cohosh – Use only with caution for promoting lagging labor

Cascara- diarrhea and vomiting

Juniper berry – can be hard on kidneys

Motherwort – skin reaction on contact for some sensitive people

Ma Huang – irritability, nervousness, high-blood pressure

Parsley – dried up milk if used in large quantities or tincture

Cramp bark- contractions

Dong Quai – Emmenagogues

Ginseng – insomnia, nervousness, diarrhea

Goldenseal – be careful

Shepherd's Purse – use only after birth or bleeding

Tansy-

Wormwood – diarrhea, cramps