

Aromatherapy post partum - 'Not forgetting Mum!'

At last, all the months of waiting, physical changes and a multitude of mixed emotions are over; your baby is here. From euphoria to exhaustion, chaos to calm, no matter how things are going, life will never be the same.

For the mother, the birth process whether easy or complicated, will have thrown up considerable physical, mental and emotional demands. And now at a time when rest and recuperation are called for, there is a small person who depends on you for their every need, every hour of the day and night!

Of course you want to meet those needs but it may be all too easy to disappear into a haze of feeds, nappies and sleeplessness, so do allow yourself time to remember who *you* are. If you are well and happy, you will undoubtedly cope better and enjoy the new experiences life with a baby will bring. Making time for relaxation and recovery will benefit you and your baby; it's not about 'pampering' but the health and wellbeing of everyone in your family.

So how can aromatherapy help at this time?

First of all, how about using essential oils in a relaxing bath? A few drops of Lavender in your bath can assist healing and ease bruising after giving birth while simultaneously helping not only your tired muscles but also your mind to relax. Ongoing, a bath can become your perfect escape time to unwind and recharge your batteries. A good way to add oils to a bath is to first mix them into a tablespoon of full fat milk which acts as an oil dispersant in water, avoiding the possibility of droplets of oil causing any skin irritation. Run the bath, add a total of up to five drops of essential oils diluted in milk, swish the water around to disperse the oils then add yourself, close your eyes and relax!

Body oils made by adding up to a total of five drops of essential oil to a tablespoon of carrier oil (good olive oil will do) can also be used for bathing. Again run the water then put the mixed oil onto your body before getting into the bath and relaxing while the warmth of the water aids your body's absorption of the oils. Avoid soap or other bath products which would wash away the oils. After towelling dry the skin feels beautifully moisturised. The same principle can be used for showers, avoiding shampoo and body washes as the oils in themselves are generally cleansing.

Although no longer being stretched as it was in pregnancy, your skin now needs to recover. Continuing to use an oil for another couple of months would be most beneficial to tone and nourish the previously stretched skin. A simple oil can be made using a good carrier such as sunflower with Lavender, Mandarin and Sandalwood, using two drops of each essential oil to a tablespoon of carrier oil.

Oil burners are another excellent way to use oils, gently introducing the aroma of your chosen oils into your environment. For safety, electric oil burners are the best option. An electric burner would be a good long term choice as it can also be used safely with babies and small children. A bowl of hot water placed out of harm's way with a few drops of oil added could be a short term alternative.

While breastfeeding, oils such as Chamomile, Lavender or Palmarosa in a burner may help you and your baby relax. If baby is crying, and you are feeling fraught Frankincense, Mandarin or Geranium would be good oils to chose. For instant effects, a drop of essential oil on a tissue can be simply inhaled.

Rest is crucial to a good recovery and lying horizontally is fundamental to the way the body renews itself so put your feet up and add Lavender, Chamomile or any of the other appropriate oils mentioned here, singly or in combination, to a burner to help you switch off. For profound relaxation just one drop of Vetiver should suffice in a bath or electric oil burner in your bedroom at night or simply inhale from a tissue.

However, if you are struggling with tiredness but have to keep going, fresh combinations such as Geranium and Lemon or Grapefruit and Eucalyptus may help. If you are unlucky enough to have a cold, Eucalyptus and Ravintsara will be very useful.

As days go by, emotions and hormones can surge and dip. Try Geranium, the great hormonal balancer, Bergamot for an instant boost of emotional sunshine or Jasmine to lift the spirits, all suitable for a bath or burner. Clary sage may also help with its calming yet mildly euphoric effects or Palmarosa which helps us 'go with the flow'. Mandarin will soothe and relax, while Frankincense and Sandalwood are centring, calming and reassuring. If you do reach a low ebb, an equal blend of Jasmine and Rose, or even just one of these two beautiful oils, should renew your sense of yourself. This is the time to retreat to the sanctuary of your bath or have a massage.

An aromatherapy massage is a wonderful option and unfailingly new mothers report that the first massage after giving birth, be it a few days or even a couple of months later, is the best massage ever, even if it's the second time around! A massage allows the effects of the birth process to be gently released from the body and mind, letting go of tension, easing aches and strains, restoring and reenergising. Combined with appropriate essential oils, a massage can work wonders and would be well placed at the top of the list of personal priorities at this time.

The oils and quantities suggested here are all appropriate for the breastfeeding mother, but do ensure that essential oils don't directly contact your new baby's skin. Experiment with oils and combinations to discover your favourites although you may find that they change in different circumstances. Introducing lovely oils into your daily life will benefit not only you but be a wonderful gift for your baby too. Enjoy!