

Complementary therapies during pregnancy

Guidance and Information for
pregnant women

Introduction

A holistic approach to care is now becoming more acceptable and sought after by women. The regular use of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) in pregnancy can help labour to start spontaneously and continue to progress well to a natural birth with fewer complications. Studies show that approximately 87% of women now use CAM as a way to retain control over their child birthing experiences (Hall et al 2011).

This leaflet provides information about some of the more commonly used CAM which may help to prepare your body in pregnancy to achieve a natural labour and birth.

Acupuncture/Acupressure

Acupuncture and acupressure is based on the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine; that health and wellbeing is dependent on the body's delicately balanced energy (Qi). When there is an imbalance – for example during pregnancy – this energy becomes blocked, and so acupuncture (fine needles) or acupressure (finger/thumb pressure) is used to unblock/restore balance and harmony.

Acupuncture and Acupressure are useful for relieving morning sickness, correction of breech presentation, preparation for labour, induction and pain relief. Also known to reduce the length of labour and need for medical intervention

This treatment should only be provided by a qualified practitioner accredited with the British Acupuncture Council

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy incorporates the use of highly concentrated essential plant oils which contain therapeutic properties and have a variety of sensory effects on the mind/body. The oils, used in massage or added to a bath, are absorbed by inhalation or through the skin and transported around the body within the circulation.

Useful for relaxation, relieving backache, constipation or oedema (swollen ankles) during pregnancy.

Caution: Many oils are not suitable for use prior to or during pregnancy/labour or breastfeeding and should only be used under the direction of a suitably qualified practitioner.

Please inform your Midwife/Consultant if undertaking this therapy to avoid possible complications or interactions with further medications/treatment.

Homeopathy

Promotes the body's own natural system of healing by 'like cures like' using highly diluted amounts of substances.

Caution: Homeopathic remedies are prescribed in relation to the symptoms. Exceeding the recommended dose can result in an increase in the actual symptoms being treated.

This treatment should only be provided by a qualified practitioner accredited with the British Homeopathic Association

Please inform your Midwife/Consultant if undertaking this therapy to avoid possible complications or interactions with further medications/treatment.

Hypnotherapy

Stimulates a change in behaviour through verbal and touch techniques to induce deep relaxation.

Hypnotherapy is useful for relieving morning sickness, fear, anxiety and high blood pressure. Pain levels have been reported to be affected, reducing the need for narcotics (types of drug) and epidurals. Hypnotherapy in pregnancy has been shown to help with a previous traumatic birth experience and can reduce the risk of post natal depression. Also used in the correction of breech presentation and can shorten the length of labour.

Massage

Usually performed using a 'base' oil; massage can relax muscles, stimulate circulation, lower blood pressure and help your body get rid of toxins and waste products by using a systematic stroking/kneading of the body. Pain is also relieved through touch as 'feel-good' chemicals are released.

Massage is useful for relaxation and reducing backache, headaches and constipation during pregnancy. It can also relieve pain and stimulate contractions during labour.

Moxibustion

Forms part of Traditional Chinese Medicine and is used to stimulate rotation of a diagnosed breech (a baby with its bottom down instead of its head) by burning a moxa (mugwort) roll by the outer edges of the little toe from 34 – 37 weeks gestation.

Caution: This treatment should only be used after consultation with a suitably qualified practitioner.

Osteopathy and Chiropractics

Involves the manipulation of joints/ligaments/bones to restore and maintain balance between nerves/muscles and skeleton, which may have been put out of alignment due to extra pressure from the pregnant uterus.

Osteopathy and Chiropractics can be useful for relieving morning sickness, backache, sciatica, groin/pubis discomfort, headaches, migraine, carpal tunnel syndrome, chest/rib discomfort and in the correction of a breech presentation.

Both techniques can also be used for treating babies who are fractious, hyperactive children or infants with colic or asthma.

This treatment should only be provided by a qualified practitioner accredited with the General Osteopathic Council

Reflexology

Reflexology involves the manipulation/massage of precise pressure points on the feet, which relate to specific parts of the body in order to treat specific conditions. It can be useful for relaxation purposes, relieving morning sickness, headaches, backache, insomnia, oedema (swollen ankles) and constipation or as pain relief in labour. Reflexology can result in a natural birth when used regularly in late pregnancy (not before due date) to induce labour.

This treatment should only be provided by a qualified practitioner accredited with the Association of Reflexologists

Yoga in pregnancy

Incorporates the mind, body and breathing techniques to keep you mentally, physically and emotionally fit in preparation for childbirth. **Only classes specific to pregnancy should be undertaken.**

Here are some additional suggestions for you to consider during pregnancy

Relaxation (in labour) is simple and effective for most women as it reduces anxiety and tension in the body. This in turn reduces adrenaline (stress hormone) which can otherwise interfere with the body's natural progression to normal birth.

Aquanatal Classes are a safe and effective way to exercise during pregnancy. They allow you to feel comfortable and re-energised while exercising. They can also be relaxing and help ease back and pelvic pain. Please contact your community midwife for details of available classes.

Here are some techniques which may provide additional support during early labour at home or in hospital

Upright positions help to get the baby into a good position for labour/birth, reducing the need for additional pain relief and increasing your control and satisfaction. This can be achieved by walking, kneeling or using a birthing ball at home, in addition in hospital a multi-track system (a piece of equipment that can support various positions to labour or give birth in) is also available.

Music provides a relaxing and calming ambience, offering more control and an ability to cope with the pain/stress of labour. Rhythmical movement during labour helps achieve good positioning and descent of the baby.

Hydrotherapy (water) can be utilised at home or in hospital (bath/pool) to increase relaxation, control and a sense of dignity. Also found to reduce medical intervention and the need for epidural.

Summary:

Many women believe CAM to be natural and so mistakenly regard them as a safe alternative to pharmaceuticals (Chitty 2009). However, they can have extremely powerful effects on the body and as with any treatment cautions and medical guidelines exist alongside each CAM. Therefore it is important to disclose any existing medical or pregnancy complication/condition prior to treatment with an experienced and qualified practitioner. You should also inform your Midwife/Consultant during your pregnancy or labour if you are undertaking the use of any CAM.

Complementary therapies should only be used under the strict guidance of a qualified and accredited practitioner. Ensure that you advise the practitioner about your pregnancy and ask about possible side effects. Please advise your midwife/consultant if you are using complementary therapies during your pregnancy. Please note The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust does not endorse any of the therapies listed in this leaflet.

If you are interested in finding a qualified practitioner, below is a list of organizations that maintain a register of qualified and

experienced practitioners who adhere to a strict code of ethics and are regulated by an appropriate professional body:

- www.acupuncture.org.uk
British Acupuncture Council
- www.aromatherapycouncil.org.uk/
The Aromatherapy Council
- www.aor.org.uk
Association of Reflexologists
- www.britishhomeopathic.org.uk
British Homeopathic Association
- www.bwy.org.uk
The British Wheel of Yoga
- www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk
British Chiropractic Association
- www.cnhc.org.uk
Complementary & Natural Healthcare Council
- www.expectancy.co.uk
Expectant Parents' Complementary Therapies Consultancy
- www.grcct.org
The General Regulatory Council for Complementary Therapies
- www.osteopathy.org.uk
General Osteopathic Council

References:

- Chitty A (2009) Review of evidence; complementary therapies in pregnancy. NCT New Digest, 46 (April) pp 20-26
- Hall,H,G and McKenna,L,G (2011) The use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by pregnant women: A Literature Review Midwifery 27(6) pp 817-824

Under review

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 0730510

ਜੇਕਰ ਇਹ ਲੀਫਲੈਟ (ਛੋਟਾ ਇਸ਼ਤਿਹਾਰ) ਤੁਸੀਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ (ਪੰਜਾਬੀ) ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਪੇਸ਼ਟ ਇੰਫਰਮੇਸ਼ਨ ਕੋ-ਆਰਡੀਨੇਟਰ ਨਾਲ **0800 0730510** ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

यदि आपको यह दस्तावेज़ अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो पेशन्ट इनफर्मेशन को-आरडीनेटर को टेलीफोन नम्बर **0800 0730510** पर फोन करें।

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আপনি যদি এই প্রচারপত্রটি আপনার নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে পেশেন্ট ইনফর্মেশন কো-অর্ডিনেটরের সাথে **0800 0730510** এই নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

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0800 0730510 على التلفون Information Co-ordinator

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Originator
Date originated
Date for review
Version
DGH ref:

Maternity Documentation Group
September 2013
September 2016
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