

# Using Herbs through Pregnancy, Birth and Postpartum

In this two part series, Naturopath, Childbirth Educator and Doula, **Kristin Beckedahl** explains how herbal medicines can be used as safe and effective remedies throughout the transition to motherhood. Part One looks at the herbal medicines that are effective during pregnancy

**Herbal** medicine has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. Growing up through the seventies and eighties as the New Age subculture was spreading its wings has in hindsight, left a lasting impression. As a young child I loved to sip on freshly brewed Chamomile and Catnip tea with my mother before bed; delightfully squeezed the inner gel from the Aloe Vera plant for sunburn - on more than one occasion; and can remember wrapping the thick, broad leaves of the Comfrey plant around my ankle as a poultice after a rollerskating sprain! On our family bookshelves were the now classics; *Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal* (1979) by Jeannine Parvati and Derek Llewellyn-Jones' *Everywoman* (1978). These sat

alongside my mother's midwifery texts including an earlier edition of the popular *Mayer's Midwifery* - 10th edition, 1984. And so began my life-long love affair with herbal medicine. It took me through my Naturopathy studies at university in 1995 to where I am today, blessed to be working within a field I feel so passionately about. Whilst at home, I relish in sharing the wonders of these potent remedies with my own children.

Even today I am still captivated by the history, folklore and the incredibly diverse applications of herbal medicines. This was our first medicine, practised without one laboratory study or clinical trial in sight and is still practised today in every country of the

world without exception. The World Health Organisation has estimated that around 80% of the world's population still use the services of herbalists for the treatment of ill-health. Despite the plethora of different approaches, four great traditional systems of herbal medicine can be identified which incorporate the majority of people in the world. They are Ayurveda, Unani/Tibb, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and its derivatives, and Western Herbal Medicine. The latter comprises the majority of my own clinics dispensary and will be the focus of this article.

Herbs also have a long history of use during pregnancy, around labour, birth, the early days of postpartum, as

**'Herbs, like most natural and complementary systems work by balancing the body; restoring the equilibrium so it can function at its best.'**

well as breastfeeding. They have been the traditional medicines of midwives for as long as we have recorded history. Throughout history the midwife was often also the community healer, well versed in the 'wise woman' herbal lore of her region, and used herbal medicines to support her work. It is only in the last 25 years or so, that we have come to discover and understand the science behind these herbs efficacy, and we can now offer explanations for their application within pharmacognosy and clinical phytotherapy.

Herbs, like most natural and complementary systems work by balancing the body; restoring the equilibrium so it can function at its

best. In contrast, pharmaceutical preparations often mask symptoms or offer temporary solutions, rarely addressing the underlying imbalance or dysfunction. Using herbs to treat some of the common ailments of pregnancy and postpartum can be both a safe, and effective choice.

## USING HERBS DURING PREGNANCY

There are a range of herbs that may be safely used in pregnancy. Practitioners classify these herbs as tonics, relaxants, anti-spasmodics, haemostatics, mild diuretics, nervines and partus-preparators. Most of the herbs also provide various trace minerals, vitamins and compounds such as chlorophyll and beneficial alkaloids.

A favourite within my practice, and one of the easiest and safest way to use herbs during pregnancy is infusions (tea). To ensure optimal benefit and safety, check the source of the herbs is reliable and preferably organic, and do not exceed the recommended dosage. If you are unsure of recommended dosage or have limited access to herbs to create your own teas, consider using specifically blended and pre-measured herbal teas.

Making a herbal infusion is similar to making a pot of tea using the loose, dried herbs. A good rule of thumb is for every 2 tablespoons (30gms) of herb/s, pour on 500-600ml of boiling water. Let it steep for at least 15 minutes to get the full benefit of the active ingredients

Photos: BirthWise BodyWise



from the herbs, then strain and drink. If required a little honey may be added for taste. You can make a fresh brew every 24 hours and drink 2 - 3 cups throughout the day; warm or cooled. This amount keeps you within the safety range when self-dosing. To reheat, you can just add a little boiling water - do not microwave your herbal tea. You will notice many herbal teas use the dried, upper parts of the plant (e.g. stems, leaves, flowers) as these have a greater therapeutic affinity for infusions. Try some or a blend, of these herbs as part of your complementary therapy approach to those common ailments during pregnancy. Or if you are feeling well, they can also be used daily as nutritive tonics. They also make a great substitute for caffeine-laden coffee and tea.

The following herbs are safe to use at the recommended dosage during pregnancy:

**Alfalfa:** A nourishing herb rich in Vitamin K and many other nutrients, Alfalfa helps combat debility and 'enrich' the blood. In the early 1900's American physicians who practised herbal medicine began to widely use Alfalfa for 'loss of energy'. In 1915, Dr. Ben A. Bradley observed Alfalfa as 'a superlative restorative tonic; rejuvenating the whole system by increasing the strength, vim, vigor and vitality of the patient'. Used as a tea, Alfalfa leaves make a wonderful nourishing tonic for pregnancy and throughout the postpartum.

**Black horehound:** An excellent remedy for settling pregnancy nausea or vomiting which is made worse by worry or anxiety. Best combined with the other anti-nausea herbs below.

**Dandelion leaf:** A gentle, effective and balanced diuretic that helps ease any fluid retention. As one of the best sources of potassium, it supports kidney function and may also help prevent and treat high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia. Rich in folic acid, B vitamins and calcium. Suitable during pregnancy and the postpartum to support rebalancing of fluid within the body.

**Chamomile:** A soothing, relaxing and antispasmodic herb. Helpful for morning sickness or a queasy tummy, and good for settling the nerves and promoting more restful sleep. Contrary to mixed messages across the internet, 2 or 3 cups of Chamomile tea per day is considered safe in pregnancy.

**Ginger:** The classic anti-nausea remedy, it works well to settle a queasy tummy. The freshly grated or dried ginger root (much stronger) can be used. Consider combining with the other anti-nausea herbs and sip throughout the day.

**Lemon Balm:** A wonderful relaxant, calming to both the nervous system and the digestive system. Great for anxiety,

**nursing naturally**  
**Breastfeeding Tea**

A delicious breastfeeding tea that may boost your milk supply and calm baby's tummy

100% organic & made in Australia

For more info & to shop online visit  
[www.nursingnaturally.com.au](http://www.nursingnaturally.com.au)

10% off for Nurture readers with code NURTURESPRING  
Valid for your first order over \$15

**BodyWise BirthWise**  
Nurturing fertility, pregnancy, birth & postpartum

BodyWise BirthWise is a Perth based practice offering holistic support services & continuity of care for women & families, throughout the transition to parenthood.

**About Kristin Beckedahl**

Kristin is a Naturopath, Childbirth Educator, Doula & Certified Placenta Encapsulation Specialist offering support from preconception, through pregnancy, birth & postpartum.

Ph: 0402 576 451 [www.bodywisebirthwise.com.au](http://www.bodywisebirthwise.com.au)



# Pregnancy and children's health and nutrition specialist

art of healing  
naturopathic medicine



Lisa Guy ND  
Naturopath & Author

lisa@artofhealing.com.au  
0414 491 595  
www.artofhealing.com.au

herbal medicine • homeopathy • nutrition

## Sound Explorers

Music and Movement  
classes for 0-6 year olds

Fun, engaging activities nurture each child's musicality, love of learning and personal growth.

Join us for singing, dancing, playing and laughing!

New classes: Cradle Song - Singing workshops for Pregnancy and Parenthood



\*Sydney's Inner West\*

For more information, visit  
[www.soundexplorers.com.au](http://www.soundexplorers.com.au)

especially when affecting sleep and the appetite. Also suits an anti-nausea tea blend.

**Meadowsweet:** One of the best digestive remedies available, protecting and soothing the mucous membranes of the digestive tract. It reduces excess acidity and eases nausea; so great for heartburn and morning sickness. Contains salicylates - avoid if you are allergic to salicylates.

**Motherwort:** As the name suggests, Motherwort is classic female herb. Aids in preparing and toning the uterus for labour, and may help ease lingering prelabour pains. Its also supportive to any anxiety or tension. In pregnancy, use after 36 weeks only.

**Nettle:** One of the finest nourishing tonic herbs available. Susan Weed describes an infusion of Nettle as a 'dark green colour, approaching black; the taste is deep and rich.' Nettle is indeed rich in chlorophyll, iron, calcium, sodium, potassium, Vitamin A, C, E and K all helping build the blood and decreasing excessive bleeding at birth. It also acts through the kidneys as a diuretic for any fluid retention.

**Oat straw:** Very nourishing to the nervous system due to the calcium and magnesium content; and may also help ward off high blood pressure. Its also rich in silica and strengthening to the skin and capillaries; helping combat varicose veins and haemorrhoids.

**Peppermint:** Deliciously refreshing and calming on digestion. Helps any nausea or stomach woes and is a great taste masker!

**Red Raspberry leaf:** Used for centuries as a uterine tonic or partus preparator. It contains fragrine, an effective alkaloid that is known to strengthen and tone the uterus, cervix and all the pelvic muscles, helping facilitate efficient contractions during labour and birth. The effects of fragrine are cumulative, i.e. the best results are achieved when its taken regularly over a longer period of time. It is rich in calcium, magnesium, iron, folic acid and vitamin C and E. As a uterine astringent it also helps reduce postpartum bleeding and aids the uterus to return to pre-pregnancy size after the birth. Because of this, it may be used in the early weeks postpartum, yet I prefer its primary use during pregnancy.

It has also been documented for use as a morning sickness remedy, so is considered safe in the first trimester. Some women are happy to drink the tea from the first trimester until the end of pregnancy, yet I feel it has its best application after about 28 weeks. If wishing to use as a single herb, consider 1 cup per day from 12-20 weeks, 2 cups per day from 20-28 weeks, 3 cups per day from 28-36 weeks, then 4-5 cups per day from 36 weeks till labour. It can also be sipped on during early labour. Once drinking 4 cups per day, you may notice the cumulative effects discussed above, as an increase in tightenings (Braxton Hicks contractions) during or soon after drinking the tea; a great sign! Some recommend avoiding it if you've had a previous premature labour or a previous precipitous labour (labour lasting less than 3 hours), or a previous caesarean section. In response to this, personally I have comfortably used Raspberry leaf tea with VBAC mothers, but I also don't see the point of using it if there is a history of premature or precipitous birth.

**Squaw vine:** This has very similar parturient properties to Raspberry leaf making for a great combination. Its also is a gentle diuretic helping with any fluid retention. I often combine this with Raspberry leaf and Motherwort towards the end of pregnancy (e.g. from 36 weeks).

**Withania:** A traditional Ayurvedic herb used as a gentle pregnancy tonic for more than 2,500 years. It is rejuvenating, balancing and strengthening to the nervous system. Great for relieving fatigue, and supporting the adaptive changes of pregnancy, and during the early postpartum weeks.

### TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY

There are many herbs to avoid using during pregnancy. Most are not available as commercially produced herbal teas, but can be sourced as loose herbs. The following list is by no means exhaustive. If unsure, always seek the professional advice of a qualified and accredited practitioner. If self-prescribing and in doubt - leave it out!

**Avoid:** Adhatoda, Barberry, Blue Cohosh, Cascara, Celery, Dong Quai, Ephedra, Feverfew, Ginseng, Golden Seal, Mugwort, Pennyroyal, Rue, Tansy, Wormwood, Yarrow.

Also keep an eye on your caffeine consumption during pregnancy; the following teas are particularly high in caffeine, so limit the intake to 1 cup per day; Black tea, Darjeeling, Earl Grey, Green tea, Oolong tea. Try Roobios Tea - this is safe.

Always seek the advice of a qualified and accredited Naturopath and/or Herbalist. See these links for accredited practitioners: ANTA ([www.australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au](http://www.australiannaturaltherapistsassociation.com.au)), ATMS ([www.atms.com.au](http://www.atms.com.au)), NHAA ([www.nhaa.org.au](http://www.nhaa.org.au))

Kristin Beckedahl is Naturopath, Childbirth Educator, Doula and mother of two. Her practice BodyWise BirthWise, provides naturopathic services and products, including herbal teas discussed in this article, holistic childbirth education, birth support and continuity of care throughout the postnatal transition the transition to parenthood.



Scarlet Eve

Handmade Luxury for Every Woman, Every Cycle.

- Cloth Pads - various designs
- Menstrual Cups (Lunette, Juju, Diva)
- Breast Pads
- Jewellery and Tea
- Gift sets and more
- Excellent customer service

Free shipping code: [nuturemag](http://nuturemag)

[www.scarleteve.com.au](http://www.scarleteve.com.au)



Advertorial

## Menstruation a time for celebration?

I don't know about you, but I spent a couple of years checking my underwear every time I went to the toilet, only imagining the glow I would feel when it finally happened. The thought of being a woman and having the power to have babies was magical to me.

In my childbearing years, suffering losses between my two beautiful sons, my bleeds became something other than magical. Sadness, devastation, resignation. Some women find their bleed hellish, even without the emotion of infertility, miscarriage or stillbirth.

When I began making and using cloth pads, I loved their wholesome, non-disposable nature. I was using pads that I'd made myself - my own pattern, my own fabrics. They were so comfortable! Comforting during a time when not much else could be. Pouring the soak water onto the garden, rinsing, washing and pegging out to dry was a cleansing ritual.

From choosing your favourite colours and patterns, placing your order... stalking the postie for your special self-gift... to that first time you wear a cloth pad, just know that you are doing something special for YOURSELF.

Comfort, health, environment, ritual, colours that speak to you.