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HEALTH INFORMATION SERIES

Ideally you will have entered pregnancy in good general health and won't have any major health problems during the term. However, it is almost inevitable that you will have some minor health issues to deal with, if only those of a normal pregnancy. It is preferred that you do not take any medications during the pregnancy, or afterwards if you are breast feeding, but, of course, you should not discontinue any prescribed remedy or drug without consulting your health practitioner. The information given below is intended as a guideline only, and does not replace the advice of a health care professional.

First trimester

Nausea and vomiting are very common in the first 3 months as your body goes through all sorts of hormonal adjustments. It is usually worse in the morning and may be associated with low blood sugar. Certainly many women find that eating some bland carbohydrate, especially crackers or arrowroot biscuits seems to help. Protein may also be low and a soya, nut or goats milk drink before rising may also help. Throughout the day try to avoid low blood sugar by eating 4 or 5 small meals instead of 2 or 3 large ones, and be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

Chamomile and **peppermint** tea is helpful for nausea. Use a teaspoon of either or both herbs per cup of water and drink freely. You can also use **Ginger** as a tea. It is made with 1/2 to 1 teaspoon chopped fresh ginger per cup of water, simmered for 10 minutes, tightly covered. This can be sweetened with honey to taste. If these are not sufficient use **Black Horehound**. Swallowing cracked ice or plain yoghurt may alleviate actual vomiting. **Slippery elm** gruel made with a tablespoon of powdered stirred into a cup of water may be used a nutritive stomach settler. Use just a little water at first to make a paste then slowly add the remaining water.

Muscle cramps may be eased by taking more calcium in the diet in the form of dark green leafy vegetables, beans, grains, nuts and seaweeds. If a supplement is required use calcium citrate for maximum absorption. This should be mixed with an equal amount of magnesium as well as some zinc, vitamin D and organic phosphorus. Take 500 - 750 mg. of each at night . Regular exercise will also help.

A multivitamin and mineral formula may be useful if nausea prevents eating. Be sure to take one with adequate folic acid and pyridoxine (B6).

If constipation occurs use **psyllium seed** powder. 1 teaspoon stirred into a glass of water acts as a soft, demulcent, bulking laxative.

Raspberry leaf should be drunk freely throughout the pregnancy to tone and strengthen the uterus and prepare it for labour. This can be substituted with **Salmonberry** or **Thimbleberry** leaves if preferred.

Miscarriage

It is estimated that one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Usually this is Nature's way of preventing unviable foetuses from progressing to term and consequently weakening the human gene pool quality. However, many miscarriages occur because the mother is unable to sustain a healthy pregnancy. Her own constitution may be weak, the closing of the cervix inadequate or her hormone balance may be poor. At the end of the third month the placenta takes over production of oestrogen and progesterone from the corpus luteum in the ovary. If the placenta is not quite ready then a hiatus may occur in hormone release and this may trigger a miscarriage. This is the reason why the third month is the highest risk time.

Preventing miscarriage starts pre-conception with techniques such as detoxification, diet, exercise and tonic herbs to strengthen the reproductive organs. Suitable herbs to be drunk as tonifying teas include **Partridge Berry, False Unicorn, Black Cohosh, Black Haw, Motherwort** and **Red Raspberry**. These herbs may be drunk for several months to prepare the uterus and other organs for pregnancy. Note that all of these herbs except the Raspberry should be halted as soon as pregnancy occurs.

In cases of threatened miscarriage the following herbs may be used, perhaps in a tincture form for increased potency: **Wild Yam, Lady's Slipper, Ginger, True Unicorn root, Skullcap, Valerian** and **Black Haw**.

Second trimester

Usually this part of the pregnancy is the least difficult. The nausea passes and the overwhelming fatigue of the first three months give way to a sense of great peacefulness and well being.

A healthy diet, plenty of exercise and rest and a minimum of emotional stress will be the best medicine. It should not normally be necessary to take any herbal remedies except the standard Red Raspberry and perhaps Nettle to enrich the blood with useful nutrients.

Third trimester

In the third trimester the baby really begins to grow. This is a time when the diet is critical. Because of the size of the baby the mother becomes unable to eat very much at one time. This means that meals must be small, frequent and very nourishing to support the developing child. Indigestion and heart burn become common, as well as swollen ankles and haemorrhoids from the weight of the baby.

Herbs to strengthen and tone the uterus can be introduced. Some of these are the ones used pre-conception to ready the uterus. They include: **Partridge Berry, Black Cohosh, Black Haw** and **Skullcap**.

For haemorrhoids use a rectal suppository containing cocoa butter and **Horse Chestnut, Agrimony, Witch Hazel** or **Tormentil**. Be sure to drink lots of water and consider using **psyllium** to soften the stool.

For indigestion and heart burn drink **Chamomile, Peppermint, Lemon Balm, Lemon Grass, Ginger, Cinnamon** or **Cardamom**.

For swollen ankles and varicose veins try to keep the feet up as much as possible. Always sit with the feet up on a stool and put bricks under the feet of the bed to raise it a couple of inches. Hydrotherapy may also be helpful for tired legs or swollen ankles. Fill 2 buckets, one with very hot water and one with cold water. Place them in the bath and, sitting on the edge of the tub, plunge your legs in first the hot for 30 seconds then the cold for a minute. Alternate between the two extremes for about 5 minutes a day. Be sure to always finish with cold. This stimulates the circulation and tones the blood vessels in the legs.

In the last month of the pregnancy you can introduce stronger more stimulating herbs which will help to promote an easy labour. These include: **Motherwort, Blue Cohosh, False Unicorn** and **Fenugreek**.

The labour

Do not use herbs yourself to influence a delivery. This should only be done at the hands of an experienced herbalist, midwife or other primary health care practitioner.

Hypotonic inertia

Blue Cohosh, Tansy, Southernwood, Goldenseal, Wormwood, Beth Root, Nutmeg, Myrrh, Pennyroyal, Hyssop, Rue, Fenugreek and **Scotch Broom**.

Hypertonic action

Wild yam, Cramp Bark, Black haw, valerian, Lobelia, Black Cohosh, Skullcap, Lady's Slipper, Jamaican Dogwood, Chamomile, Linden.

Essential oils may also be useful here. These should be gently massaged into the abdomen, diluted in almond oil. Suitable oils include: **Rose, Rosemary, Lavender, Chamomile, Ylang ylang, Geranium** and **Verbena**.

Cervical rigidity

Jamaican Dogwood, Lavender, Lobelia, Black Haw, Valerian, Blue Cohosh, Lady's Slipper. The essential oils mentioned above may also be useful.

Excessive bleeding

Nettle, Cayenne, Shepard's Purse and **Agrimony**.

Placental retention

Beth Root, Dong Quai, Shepard's Purse, Wild Yam, False Unicorn root, Milk vetch, Goldenseal and **Motherwort**.

Post partum pain

Lady's Slipper, Ginger, Yarrow, Valerian, Pasque Flower, Jamaican Dogwood, Wild Yam and **Black Cohosh**. For extreme pain, under professional guidance, herbs such as **Aconite** or **Belladonna** may be used, provided the mother is not breast feeding.

There are some herbal formulas which can safely be used by all new mothers, and which do not require professional guidance.

Perineal wash

A useful treatment for any tearing during delivery and after episiotomy. It is used in the form of a sitz (hip) bath used daily. Suitable herbs could include **Calendula, Arnica flowers, Comfrey leaves, Plantain leaves, Goldenseal, St. John's Wort** and **Witch Hazel**. Essential oils of **Cypress** and **Lavender** may be added to the water. Sea salt is also useful in the water as an antiseptic and to promote healing.

To enrich and increase the milk supply

Borage, Goat's Rue, Fennel, Raspberry, Vervain, Alfalfa, Anise, Blessed Thistle, Melilot and **Nettle**.

To rebalance hormones and tone the reproductive organs

Partridge Berry, White Dead Nettle, Yarrow, Chaste Berry, Raspberry, False Unicorn, True Unicorn, Licorice, Sarsaparilla, Blessed Thistle and Dong Quai.

To reduce milk flow during weaning

Sage, Motherwort, Yarrow, Thyme and Raspberry.

Post natal depression

This is a relatively common complaint, complicated by the overwhelming fatigue the new mother usually feels. It is important to determine the actual cause if possible. Factors to consider include hormonal balance, debility and constitutional depletion, nutritional inadequacies especially B vitamins and iron, stress and anxiety. Herbs which may be helpful include all the stimulating and tonic nervines: **Borage, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Rosemary, Pasque Flower, Vervain** and **Oatstraw**. Use **Chaste Berry** and **False Unicorn** to rebalance the hormones. Essential oils may be very helpful, in a bath or a massage. Try **Jasmine, Rose, Lavender** and **Basil**.

Herbs to avoid during pregnancy

Belladonna	Barberry
Goldenseal	Ginseng
Juniper	Sassafras
Licorice	Ephedra (Ma Huang)
Mistletoe	Bryony
Mugwort	Southernwood
Myrrh	Dong Quai
Nutmeg	Pokeroot
Oregon grape	Comfrey
Parsley	Male fern
Pennyroyal	Wormwood
Rue	Feverfew
Scotch broom	Celandine
Sweet Annie	Tansy
Thuja (Arbor vitae)	Sage

Essential oils to avoid during pregnancy

Cinnamon	Basil
Hyssop	Nutmeg
Myrrh	Clary sage
Savory	Sage
Thyme	Oregano
Cypress	Marjoram
Juniper	Pennyroyal
Aniseed	Fennel