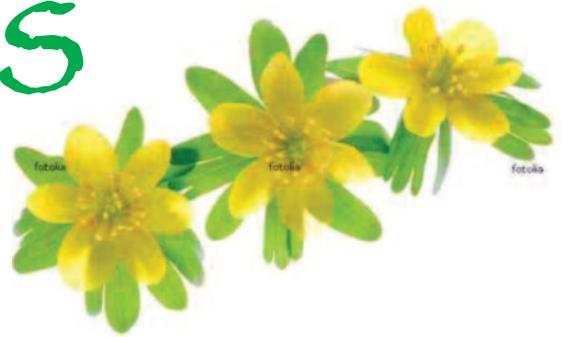


Top Ten

homeopathic remedies

for pregnancy and birth



Lyssa Clayton

Many women choose to have homeopathy available to them during pregnancy and labour, and they often want to know that there is another non-pharmacological option they could choose to support themselves and their babies, or something to call upon if labour is not going smoothly or is more challenging than they imagined.

As homeopathy is a form of energy medicine, it is non-toxic and ideal for women wishing to avoid other medications. It is also extremely useful for addressing what is often termed the 'minor complaints' of pregnancy – but those 'minor complaints' can colour a woman's whole experience of pregnancy.

Ideally I would suggest that any woman wishing to use homeopathy during pregnancy and labour consults a practitioner, in order to obtain a very individualised treatment. Part of the aim of homeopathy during pregnancy is to help each woman and baby to be in the healthiest possible state - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually - as they approach labour. This also gives the woman a chance to have the most appropriate remedies available to her during labour, as well as those which are indicated for many women at various stages of pregnancy.

When we choose remedies to be homeopathic we want to take into account the pattern of emotional and physical symptoms being expressed by the woman or baby. We can look at labour as a time to do almost first aid or acute prescribing.

However, I also want to stress that many women need nothing else apart from the support of their partner, their midwife, and their own strength and inner knowledge. I don't want to see homeopathy being used as a way to medicalise pregnancy and birth. As with good midwifery, if there is nothing to do, then do nothing but be ready for when your vital skills and knowledge are needed.

Top Ten homeopathic remedies for pregnancy and birth

I have chosen these top ten remedies partly because they are indispensable to my practice, and partly because women may already have access to them through owning basic home remedy or childbirth kits. The use of these ten homeopathic remedies also spans pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period.

I found it far harder than I imagined choosing just ten top remedies, and in the end I decided to go for the ten I would really struggle to work without. So before I discuss the official top ten, there are a few others I'd like to mention briefly.

Along with *arnica* I would want *bellis-perennis* for deeper tissue trauma and for abdominal wounds from surgery such as caesarean section. I should also mention *kali-phos* for treating exhaustion and picking up energy during labour, which can be used for a woman when no other remedy seems indicated and there is no actual problem except tiredness. *Kali-phos* could also be used for the woman's birth supporters. I would want *cimicifuga* (black cohosh) for a woman who has deep fears related to a previous trauma, often but not always, related to pregnancy. I'd use it when contractions are sharp and spasmodic and don't dilate the cervix, or when labour completely ceases with the appearance of strangers eg after a shift change of midwives. I would definitely suggest having *calendula* or *hypercal tincture* as part of the remedy kit. *Calendula* can really speed up the healing process in wounds. As with other homeopathic remedies, it can be taken internally in its dilute, potentised form, especially if there is already infection present. *Hypercal tincture* can be used for

the same purpose, as it is a combination of *hypericum* and *calendula*. *Hypericum* is appropriate for injuries and wounds to nerve rich areas of the body. Both tinctures have antiseptic qualities to help prevent infection.

Tinctures can be added to bath water or by putting 10 drops in warm water and using the water for compresses or for bathing injured parts, or for sore and cracked nipples at the beginning of breastfeeding. Use the above remedies when there is excessive pain from a very small wound, for example torn tissues.

Bach Rescue Remedy® or Australian Bush Flower Emergency Essence® are again familiar to many people. For shock, panic, distress, emotional shock, and anxiety, drops can be taken directly in the mouth or put into water and sipped as needed.

Part of the purpose of writing about these remedies is to give a very brief introduction and snapshot of these remedy 'pictures', and give some idea of the range of ailments that a homoeopath might use remedies for. I hope it might help take another step towards midwives and complementary health practitioners working together in the best interests of mothers and babies.

Last week I read a blog entry by a midwife working in Senegal, Africa, with no access to the range of technologies and interventions we have in the developed world, but she did have a homeopathic childbirth remedy kit – small, portable, and invaluable in situations where something needs to change during a difficult labour. I'll certainly be interested in reading more about how they use the remedies in such a challenging birth environment.



1 **Arnica Montana:** also known as **leopard's bane** or **wound herb**

This is a remedy that is already well known in many homes for aiding healing from accidents and injuries, soft tissue trauma, bumps, bruises and swelling. Many women use it to aid healing after normal vaginal birth. *Arnica* can ease tired, sore, or bruised muscles in the arms, legs, back and the uterus, after unusual exercise or activity, and so is a very useful remedy to remember for labour – which of course involves great physical exertion! It helps when exhaustion leads to lessening of contractions during labour. *Arnica* is invaluable in the postnatal period for helping bruised and sore tissues, so can be used for both mother and baby after a long or traumatic labour, or especially after an instrumental birth. *Arnica* can help with shock where a woman does not want to be touched or to have medical staff near, and especially in situations where the mother insists she is well but is not. *Arnica* is also thought to help prevent infection, and promote reabsorption of blood from tissues.

Aconite: also known as **monkshood**

2

Aconite is characteristically used for fear and restlessness from panic or fright, which is often accompanied by difficult breathing. *Aconite* can be used for a woman who is frightened and restless during labour, who may be thinking either she or her baby will die, or used when fear hinders labour or the labour is very fast and overwhelmingly intense. It can be used during the postnatal period to treat the mother and baby for shock, after a very fast labour, and can treat the retention of urine in a newborn. Personally, I've used *aconite* when a woman or baby is still in a state of shock from a difficult birth, and when a woman is frightened to conceive after a previous traumatic experience. It may be worth partners thinking about taking *aconite* themselves if they feel fearful!

3 **Caulophyllum:** also known as **blue cohosh** or **squaw root**

Caulophyllum is one of the remedies that many women, midwives and birth workers seem to have heard about. I would suggest that it is **never** taken routinely. As with any homeopathic remedy, if taken to excess when it is not well indicated it can produce the very symptoms you are trying to avoid. However, *caulophyllum* is indicated for stop-start labours, where contractions don't become co-ordinated, longer or stronger, and the cervix is not dilating. Contractions are focused in the lower part of the uterus while the fundus remains soft, or they can be painful and sharp, shifting about from place to place. The woman may experience exhaustion, trembling, thirst, chilliness, weakness, and rheumatic pain in small joints such as the fingers. Pre-labour *caulophyllum* can be used as a single dose of 30c first if there has been a pattern of stopping and starting. Because *caulophyllum* can produce contractions in the woman, it can also be used to do the opposite: to calm a sensitive uterus when contractions start prematurely or are easily stimulated during pregnancy. As a uterine tonic it is worth considering using after birth if the woman's uterus is not contracting down well.

Gelsemium: also known as **yellow jasmine**

4

Gelsemium is often indicated for anticipatory anxiety and when women are fearful about labour due to anxiety about whether they are physically capable of actually doing it – it's a kind of 'stage fright'. Women may be weak or trembling with anxiety, and making statements like 'I can't do it, I'm not strong enough!'. *Gelsemium* can also be used for a slow sluggish labour, where contractions do not establish and the woman has a feeling of heaviness and drowsiness. It can be used to treat complaints after receiving bad news, for example when a woman has been told that she is 4cm dilated when she was expecting to be 9cm. *Gelsemium* is indicated when there is the unusual symptom of the baby seeming to go back up the birth canal with contractions – perhaps the baby has a form of stage fright? It can be used when *caulophyllum* seems indicated but doesn't help.

5

Pulsatilla: also known as **windflower** or **meadow anemone**

Women who may benefit from *pulsatilla* can seem changeable, weepy, emotional, and with a personality switch from laughing to crying to crossness. It can be used for a woman who is easily affected by external surroundings and when changes, or people coming and going affect her focus. The woman may say things like '*I can't do it, help me*' or '*Tell me what to do*', and needs a lot of sympathy from the people around her providing support. The woman may experience changeable contractions, where each one seems different from the last. *Pulsatilla* can be used for women who are aggravated in warm stuffy rooms, and who will benefit from fresh cool air and from moving around gently. Women may feel less thirsty despite having a dry mouth. It can be useful to remember *pulsatilla* for the third stage of labour, if contractions to expel the placenta don't start up again strongly – and when no other remedy seems indicated. One common use of *pulsatilla* is for babies in breech or changeable positions, where they do not seem able to settle into a stable lie. To try and encourage babies to turn and settle in a vertex presentation, *pulsatilla* may be indicated from 36 weeks' gestation or for 'late' labours where you might have a sense the baby isn't ready to leave the comfort of the womb and take their first move towards independence.

Staphysagria: also known as **stavesacre** or **palmated larkspur**

Staphysagria is invaluable as a remedy after any instrumental birth, for painful episiotomy or tears, for stinging pain in wounds, or for an episiotomy which is taking a long time to heal and is intensely painful. *Staphysagria* has an affinity for stretched tissues and sphincters, and so can be useful after catheterisation, an unpleasant internal examination, or indeed after a normal birth if the emotional picture of the woman suggests it. The woman's emotions are often suppressed and held in – anger or indignation about how she was treated in labour, and during birth. Women may feel a sense of being abused or invaded, not respected, or even humiliated by their experience, all these are painful emotional wounds. All wounds and cuts are unusually painful and sensitive to touch and heal slowly.

6

7

China: also known as **china officinalis** or **peruvian bark**

China can be used to treat weakness, debilitation and fainting from loss of body fluids eg bleeding, breastfeeding, diarrhoea, vomiting. I've sometimes used it alternating with *ferrum-met* in a low potency (6c or 6x) for weakness after blood loss and anaemia, to help get the woman's blood volume and haemoglobin levels up.

Sepia: also known as **cuttlefish ink**

A typical *sepia* picture could be a woman who has had several babies in a few years. She now feels exhausted, joyless, worn out, irritable, snappy, indifferent or ambivalent to her partner, children and friends. Women may also have a heavy dragging feeling in their abdomen, or a sluggish energy which can be helped by vigorous exercise to stimulate stagnant energy and circulation. Often women have a desire to be alone, or want to be cared for without having to ask. *Sepia* can also be used to treat morning sickness which is made worse by the thought or smell of food but eases for a while after eating. Typical food desires are for sour vinegary foods and sweets, but women will often be averse to bread, milk or fatty foods. *Sepia* can be used for haemorrhoids or varicose veins.

8

9

Nux-vomica: also known as **strychnos nux vomica** or **poison nut**

This remedy is useful for an over-stimulated, over-loaded irritable digestive system which is aggravated by drugs and medicines. Women may feel irritable, chilly, impatient, over-worked, and over-sensitive to noise and odours. *Nux-vomica* has an affinity with the liver so there are many digestive symptoms, such as morning sickness, heartburn, constipation in pregnancy, belching, retching, indigestion, cramping, or nausea with an inability to be sick. Women may feel a heavy weight in their stomach after eating, which is made worse by rich food and stimulants. Common indications are insomnia and feeling much worse from lack of sleep. Colic pain in babies can stem from adverse effects of drugs such as antibiotics, syntometrine, pain relief drugs, or Vitamin K. *Nux-vomica* can be used for a baby who strains to poo or pass wind. Babies may seem irritable, windy, or burpy with greenish stools.

Kali-carb: also known as **potassium carbonate**

10

Backache is a prominent symptom for this remedy. In pregnancy and particularly in labour the woman often wants very hard pressure on her back, either through someone leaning their weight on her or from pressing against a wall. The woman may also have cutting pains in the lumbar region, extending to her legs and buttocks. These pains may be described as sharp, shooting, stabbing or nagging. It is worth trying *kali-carb* before labour begins if a baby persists in staying in a posterior position, or during labour when a posterior baby is not turning. The woman may present a picture of grim determination – ‘I’m going to do it my own way’ and may often want company and people around her, but can be very irritable with them.

Safety and training

At this stage I feel I need to add a note about safety, and the training required for prescribing these remedies. While potentised homeopathic remedies are non-toxic in a pharmaceutical and chemical sense, they are potent and powerful medicinal agents and so do need to be used with respect, and with appropriate knowledge, training and skill. So the remedies I have given a mini-snapshot of in this article illustrate, I hope, the range of what a homeopath takes into account rather than acting as prescribing guidelines.

If your interest has been sparked into investigating the potential of homeopathy to help the women you are caring for, I'd highly recommend finding a homeopath to work alongside. Introductory workshops and courses can help build your basic knowledge of remedies for home self-prescribing, and if you want to take this further speak to a local homeopath or contact the Society of Homeopaths or Faculty of Homeopaths for information on more formal training.

Useful resources

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I began learning about homeopathy over 25 years ago and continue to be fascinated by the philosophy and ideas which underpin it and excited by its potential in enhancing and supporting health. I have three children, two of whom are now young adults. Homeopathy has been an integral and invaluable tool for me in caring for their well-being from pregnancy and birth onwards. I became involved in birth issues in 1987. I joined the local AIMS and ARM groups and then completed the first Scottish Birth Teachers course. I qualified as a homeopath in 1998 and with my practice I can now combine these two strands of passionate interest.