

Aromatherapy for the Reproductive System

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Among the most common problems for women are those involving the reproductive system. As women with personal experience in this area, we will focus first on several female problems. This topic has been the subject of many good books; we recommend *Herbal Healing for Women* by Rosemary Gladstar, *Herbal for the Child-Bearing Years* by Susun Wees and *Hygeia: a Woman's Herbal* by Jeannine Parvati Baker (see bibliography).

PMS and Menstrual Cramps

The more researchers learn about hormonal substances called prostaglandins, the more obvious it becomes that they can cause PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and menstrual cramps. Certain prostaglandins called PG2 can be responsible for headaches, bowel changes, nausea, breast tenderness, joint pain and water retention, and contribute to moodiness, irritability and alcohol cravings-all common PMS symptoms. Ginger, cinnamon, cloves, thyme and garlic lower PG2 and can be eaten in foods. Relieve menstrual cramps with essential oils of chamomile, lavender, marjoram and melissa. For depression associated with PMS, nothing is better than clary sage, but you may also try neroli, jasmine and ylang-ylang. If you experience water retention, use grapefruit, carrot seed and juniper.

Any of these essential oils (except garlic) can be used as a massage or bath oil. If headache is among your PMS symptoms, try inhaling lavender, marjoram or melissa. (For best results with any PMS or menstruation remedy, begin using it a couple of days before symptoms are expected.)

For problems related to hormonal imbalance, treat the liver with carrot seed, rosemary, helichrysum and rose. To encourage menstruation, use clary sage. Most women's conditions benefit from the use of the balancing lavender, geranium and rose.

Menstrual Cramp Oil

4 drops lavender
2 drops marjoram
2 drops chamomile or clary sage*
3 drops geranium
1 drop ginger
1 ounce carrier oil (infused oil of yarrow)

Combine ingredients. Apply to abdomen, hips and lower back.

*See *Materia Medica* "Considerations."

Yeast Infections

Many women have experienced at least one bout of yeast infection, which is usually easy to control. Chamomile, lavender, bergamot and tea tree inhibited about 70 percent of candida growth in laboratory experiments. Although opinion varies among

gynecologists as to whether common yeast infections can be transmitted between sex partners, it's safest to treat both individuals.

Douching has met with criticism in recent years because some gynecologists fear it can upset the normal vaginal balance of a healthy woman or spread infection into the uterus. If done gently, however, douching is a good way to treat vaginal infection. Be sure to suspend the bag no higher than shoulder level so that the flow of water isn't too strong.

An appropriate essential-oil blend can also be applied to the abdomen or used in a bath. Another recommendation is to soak a tampon—or better, a small, soft natural sea sponge—in water containing essential oils. Use two sponges and alternate, sterilizing sponges between use by gently boiling or soaking in vinegar with a few drops of lavender oil. (Rinse well before using.)

Tea tree or lavender are very effective for vaginal yeast. We recommend *caulophyllum* or yarrow oil as a carrier oil.

Yeast Relief

1 drop thyme (chemotype linalol only)
1 drop chamomile
1 drop lavender
2 drops tea tree
2 drops bergamot
1 drop geranium
2 cups of warm yarrow tea

Combine ingredients. If you don't have the chemo-type linalol, don't replace it with other thymes—they are too strong. For a simpler recipe, use 4 drops each lavender and tea tree oils. Douche two times a day. You can also mix the essential oils in 1/2 ounce of an infused oil of calendula or in *caulophyllum*. Insert one dropperful morning and night. A panty liner is recommended during the day.

Vaginal Bolus

Boluses (see "Guidelines" chapter) are effective treatments for a host of vaginal problems, especially cervical dysplasia (irregular cell growth on the cervix, which is precancerous). *Eucalyptus polybractea* (cryptone type) is one of the best remedies. This recipe can be customized to treat specific infections.

Bolus Recipe

2 teaspoons calendula blossoms
1 teaspoon goldenseal root
1 teaspoon yarrow leaves or flowers
8 drops tea tree oil
8 drops *Eucalyptus polybractea* (cryptone type)
1/4 cup cocoa butter

If this type of eucalyptus is not available, replace it with lavender or use 16 drops of tea tree.

Poor Circulation

Many female complaints are due to what Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) calls "blood stagnation." This basically means poor circulation in the abdomen, which contributes to problems such as hemorrhoids and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Use castor oil packs and sitz baths with essential oils (see below) to stimulate circulation. (For an understanding of TCM, we recommend Leslie Tierra's book *Herbs for Life*.)

Sitz Bath-A sitz bath can decrease menstrual cramps, PID and hemorrhoids. The bath requires two tubs large enough to sit in with water covering the abdomen. Fill one tub with hot water, the other with cold. Switch back and forth between the hot and cold tubs about four times. We find that four minutes in the hot and one minute in the cold is tolerable, and actually feels good after a few rounds. (You will soon want the hot hotter and the cold colder!) When you get out, your midsection will be bright red with blood circulation. When I (Mindy) had PID, this was the only thing that provided relief from the pain. This routine should be repeated as often as possible during the day.

Castor-Oil Pack-Getting results from using a castor-oil pack requires dedication and a little mess, and can take weeks or even months to produce results. Still, it can work wonders on pain from internal scar tissue, ovarian cysts, fibroids and even infection. You will need enough cotton flannel-several layers thick-to cover the abdomen, and about two cups of castor oil. Warm the oil, then dip the flannel to thoroughly soak it. Wring slightly to remove excess oil (it shouldn't drip). Place the flannel over the abdomen and cover with a piece of plastic, then a heating pad. Leave the pack on 30 minutes to one hour. When done, wrap the flannel in a plastic bag. After removing it from the bag, it may be reheated in a low oven. Replace every two weeks or so, depending on how much you reuse it. We like to use essential oils with castor oil packs. Add one-quarter teaspoon of essential oils to two cups of castor oil before making the pack. Lavender is a good choice.

Menopause

Menopause symptoms can include hot flashes, bone fragility, confusion, depression and a dry, less elastic vagina with a thinner lining-all caused by the erratic hormone activity. Both dry skin and vagina need a rejuvenating massage oil or cream. The hormone balancers geranium and lavender help menopausal symptoms.

Pharmacologist Tony Balacs states that many essential oils have hormonelike activity, and speculates that their structure is so similar to the hormone's that they interact with the same receptors. Estrogenic oils include clary sage, sage, anise, fennel, angelica, coriander, cypress and niaouli (a type of tea tree oil).

Herbal Adjuncts-Beneficial uterine tonics include raspberry leaves, false unicorn root and motherwort. Herbs that help promote a normal menstrual flow are blue cohosh and partridge berry. Herbs that slow excessive menstrual flow or bleeding after birth include shepherd's purse and lady's mantle.

Good remedies for PMS or cramps are gamma-linoleic acid (GLA) (found in evening primrose, black currant and borage-seed oils), vitex, wild yam root, red raspberry leaf, licorice root and cramp bark.

Nine Essential Oils for Women's Complaints

Rose	universal female tonic and balancer, suitable for all gynecological problems
Clary sage	depression, PMS, menopause, post-partum blues (avoid long-term use if you have fibrocystic breasts or uterine fibroids)
Marjoram	antispasmodic, headache, menstrual cramps, constipation
Chamomile	anti-inflammatory, soothes frayed nerves, PMS, migraine
Lavender	overall equalizer, skin care, shock
Geranium	hormone balancer, menopause, PMS, yeast
Tea tree	antibacterial, herpes, the best yeast remedy, cystitis
Bergamot	widely antiseptic, water retention, yeast, depression
Neroli	insomnia, depression, anxiety, stretch marks

The best hormonal normalizer is vitex, suitable for almost any reproductive-system condition, and especially useful for treating PMS, irregular menstruation, cervical dysplasia, uterine fibroids and menopause. Herbs for balancing menopausal hormones are black cohosh, ginseng, dong quai, Siberian ginseng, licorice, fenugreek seed and hops. Vitamin E is also useful.

Pregnancy

Inhaling spearmint helps alleviate morning sickness; neroli and lavender can be very soothing throughout pregnancy and during labor. See "Massage" chapter for a recipe for massage oil for pregnant bellies. (See the "[Guidelines for Use](#)" chapter for contraindications in pregnancy and for information about which oils are safe to use.)

Herbal Adjuncts-In the first trimester of pregnancy, use gentle herb teas such as chamomile and lemon balm to deal with the usual maladies, but avoid strong emmenagogue (menstrual flow-inducing) herbs such as pennyroyal, rue, wormwood, goldenseal, juniper, sage and tansy. Recommended herbs for threatened miscarriage include black haw, cramp bark and false unicorn root. Toning and nutritive pregnancy herbs include raspberry, rose hip, chamomile, wild oat, nettles and partridge berry. For morning sickness, try an herbal tea of meadowsweet, spearmint, ginger and chamomile.

Lactation

Oils of anise, dill and fennel, used in a bath or massage, will ensure a healthy supply of milk for your baby. The herbs themselves can also be added to food or made into tea. Drinking herbal teas not only can increase the quality of your milk, but will also increase the fluids you need in your body to create it. Sage helps decrease lactation when you are ready to wean your baby. (Drink at least 2 cups of tea per day.)

Prostatitis

Prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) can be helped by aromatherapy when combined with herbs and nutrition. An herbal sitz bath with chamomile and rosemary reduces inflammation, stimulates circulation and relaxes muscles in the pelvic region. Not quite as effective but more practical for some men is a warm compress or a massage oil applied behind the scrotum. Research has shown that muscle relaxation is vital in relieving a prostate that is chronically inflamed because of hormone imbalance. Be sure to have a doctor check this condition before attempting self-treatment.

Prostate Oil

5 drops lavender
3 drops pine
3 drops German chamomile
1 ounce calendula oil

Mix oils and apply to the area near the prostate twice daily to help reduce inflammation.

Male Hormonal Tonic

2 drops niaouli
5 drops pine
3 drops sandalwood
2 drops myrtle
1 drop patchouli (optional)
1 ounce carrier oil

Use daily in the bath or as a massage or body oil.

Herbal Adjuncts-For an inflamed prostate, drink a tea (or take a tincture or pills) of saw palmetto berries, nettle root, sarsaparilla root, uva ursi leaves and echinacea root.

Viral Skin Infections

Genital warts are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV), and affect both men and women. They're difficult to detect at first, but turn white when dabbed with a half-vinegar, half-water mixture. Essential oils offer one of the most effective antiviral treatments for common or genital warts. Apply oils with a glass-rod applicator, dropper or a cotton-tipped swab two to four times daily-and apply only to the wart itself, as the oils can burn sensitive skin. Protect the surrounding area with salve. Have genital warts removed by a doctor if the oils don't eliminate them. They can be passed to sexual partners and can cause cervical dysplasia.

Genital-Wart Oil

5 drops thuja essential oil
10 drops tea tree essential oil
1/4 ounce castor or caulophyllum oil
800 IU vitamin E oil

Combine ingredients. The vitamin E facilitates healing and can be obtained by opening two 400-IU capsules.

Herpes

Herpes is a viral infection common among both men and women. Herpes simplex manifests around the mouth (cold sores) or the genitals. The painful Herpes zoster (shingles) is caused by the chicken-pox virus. Both strains can lie dormant in the nervous system and are often triggered by stress.

Herpes Formula

4 drops Eucalyptus citriodora
4 drops MQV (niaouli)
1 drop geranium
2 drops tea tree
2 drops bergamot
1 ounce carrier oil (calendula-infused oil is best)

Apply to affected area two or three times a day.