

Herbs for Inducing Labor

Discovering the truth about herbs to induce labor and their safety.

Feb 16, 2007 Brenda Lane

Herbs are sometimes used to induce labor contractions. There are potential unwanted side effects with herbs that all pregnant women need to know.

The use of herbs for medicinal purposes is centuries old. Herbs are available today in many grocery stores, in addition to natural or health food stores. They can be purchased whole (as a plant and dried), in capsules or tablets, as a tea, in extracts or tinctures (small amount dissolved in alcohol), as a concentrate in oil or in creams or lotions.

Herbs can be either *medicinal* (useful for treating health-related symptoms) or *nutritional* (adding vitamins and minerals to your diet.). Consumers use herbs to treat countless illnesses and discomforts as well as a way to naturally induce labor. However there are several cautions for pregnancy with any and all herbs:

1. *Herbs are not regulated by the FDA. In some cases this can mean that herbs or herbal preparations may contain contaminants. You should read labels carefully before using any herbs or substances containing herbs.*
2. *Do not use any herb or herbal remedy during your first trimester when the baby's development is most sensitive. For a list of other things to avoid, see Top Things to Avoid in Pregnancy,*
3. *Check with your medical provider prior to taking herbs for any reason, including as a way of naturally inducing labor.*
4. *Do not use any herbal induction method until at least 37 weeks of pregnancy or later.*

Are herbs safe to use as labor induction?

The answer is, it depends. The first concern is that the use of herbs and their safety is not well known by all medical providers. Few providers, with the exception of an experienced herbalist and some midwives, are familiar with the herbs that can be used safely during pregnancy.

The other problem is that herbs have unpredictable results. Just like one person may take tylenol with no difficulty, others may have problems if they take it. Medicinal herbs can act the same as medications in how they affect people differently.

For both of these reasons, some medical providers will advise mothers to steer clear of all herbs for *any reason* or at any stage of pregnancy, just as you would with most types of medication.

The bottom line is to be sure that you do your own research, follow the guidelines provided and consult with a licensed herbalist, as well as your own primary provider, before you try any herb or combination for labor induction.

What herbs are used to induce labor?

The following herbs are often used to induce labor or to prepare your body for birth, according to The Natural Pregnancy Book by Aviva Jill Romm. (See Best Pregnancy Books for a complete list of recommended reading.) None of these herbs should be used to naturally induce labor prior to 37 weeks.

- **Black cohosh** - often used to relieve irregular contractions and encourage stronger contractions (If this causes nausea and/or lightheadedness, discontinue.)
- ***Blue cohosh** - helps to increase uterine tone; (can also cause nausea/lightheadedness - mothers should discontinue use of this herb if they experience any of these side effects.)
- **Chamomile** - encourages relaxation and promotes sleep; Some experts feel that this herb as a tea is gentle enough to use in moderation anytime after the first trimester, however it should not be used if you have any spotting or bleeding during pregnancy as it can promote menstruation.
- **Cramp bark** - a uterine toner that relieves cramping and increases relaxation; This herb may be contraindicated for women with hypertension or high blood pressure.
- **False unicorn root** - Promotes uterine tone and hormone production.
- **Partridge berry** - A uterine toner that relaxes the uterus as well as helps with backache, leg cramps and overall tension.
- **Motherwort** - encourages relaxation and reduces hypertension as well as stimulates the uterus.
- **Evening primrose oil** - this contains a fatty acid that helps to stimulate prostaglandins, a hormone which increases uterine contractions as well as ripen the cervix.
- **Red Raspberry leaf** - used as a uterine toner and readily available in a tea.

It cannot be stressed enough that mothers who are considering using herbs use extreme caution and consult with experienced herbalists or midwives who can provide appropriate dosage amounts.