

## Utilization of Herbal Remedies during and after Pregnancy: An Ancient Practice

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### Abstract

In our nation, lots of herbal remedies are use during and after the pregnancy. These products are in practice since ancient times. The herbal remedies are safe and having significant effect on the maternal outcomes and lactation. India is a land of rich biodiversity and plant based medicines are widely used from the time immemorial for treatment of various diseases. A living tradition proved by the existence of rural practitioners of herbal medicine including birth attendance and bone setters as also by the abundance of simple home (grandmother) remedies still used extensively in the countryside. The remedies like Panjiri, Ajwain, Ashwagandha and hearal tea have significant effect on lactation, depression management and decline breast engorgement. Furthermore, the present study concluded that, herbal medicines can be used during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care after proper validation of the remedies. The utilization of herbal remedies should be done under expert monitoring to avoid possible harmful effects.

**Keywords:** Herbal; Remedies; Pregnancy; Panjiri; Ajwain

### Introduction

Herbal remedies have long played a part in the journey of motherhood around the world. In the postpartum period, a time of healing, restoring, and re-connecting with oneself, natural remedies can be used to not only support physical resilience and recovery, but also to aid in the emotional shifts that occur. Different parts of the plant provide different benefits in the postpartum period. Many mothers turn to a bowl of oatmeal each morning and report that it helps with their milk supply, but oats are also soothing to the nervous system.

Making a tincture from their seeds is great for calming the mind and body.<sup>1</sup> Plants are essential for human survival as it touches all spheres of human life as food, fuel, fodder, cloth, shelter and medicine. According to WHO, 80% of people in developing countries still relies on traditional medicine to meet their primary health needs. The WHO stated traditional medicine as the total sum of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures that are used to maintain health, as well as to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat

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physical and mental illness. India is a land of rich biodiversity and plant based medicines are widely used from the time immemorial for treatment of various diseases. A living tradition proved by the existence of rural practitioners of herbal medicine including birth attendants and bone setters as also by the abundance of simple home (grandmother) remedies still used extensively in the countryside. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine forms the basis of all these practices. Ayurveda has a well classified *Materia medica*, consisting mainly drugs of plant origin. Charaka Samhitha (900 BC) the first written document on Ayurveda describes 341 plants and its therapeutic use and further classified these plants in terms of their physiological activity.<sup>2</sup> A descriptive survey was conducted to document the use of ethnomedicinal plants. Use of eighteen ethnomedicinal plants was documented for the prophylaxis and management of postpartum complications from local community. *Zingiber officinale*, *Asparagus racemosus*, *Trapa natans*, *Acacia senegal*, *Trachyspermum ammi*, *Piper longum*, and *Symplocos racemosa* possessing galactagogue, uterine tonic, diuretic, antiemetic, and wound healing activity were found to be most commonly used ethnomedicinal plants.<sup>3</sup> Studies found that women use herbal remedies as a preventative measure or as a treatment due to personal dissatisfaction with conventional treatment, side effects of prescribed medications, and history of treatment failure.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Most commonly used herbal remedies***

In our nation, lots of herbal remedies are used during and after the pregnancy. These products are in practice since ancient times. The herbal remedies are safe and having significant effect on the maternal outcomes and lactation. The remedies are economic and easily available at most of the houses. Some of the remedies are used in day to day life while some of them are especially related with pregnancy.

Panjiri is probably one of the most commonly relied upon herbs to help women increase their milk supply. While we know that milk needs to be expressed in order to be made, sometimes the use of a galactagogue (a substance that promotes lactation) will help when boosting production is the goal. Many mothers will crush up ginger and make a tea with them which can be consumed several times a day.<sup>5</sup> Ajwain is another great galactagogue that is commonly used in conjunction with milk or ghee. As a bitter herb, it also helps to stimulate appetite and promote digestion; so for those women who are struggling in this area, the herbal remedy

might be one to consider.<sup>5</sup> Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*) is herb is commonly used to help the body regulate stress and belongs to the herbal category of adaptogens. While traditionally used in Ayurvedic medicine as well as home remedies, it has been appreciated all over the world for its ability to support the immune system, calm irritability, and improve memory.<sup>6</sup> Sage taken internally it has antibacterial and antiseptic properties and is also anti-hypertensive, anti-diabetic, and anti-inflammatory. Ingest with moderation while breastfeeding, as it can slow lactation.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Effect of Herbal remedies on lactation***

A randomized, double-blind controlled trial in Thailand highlighted that Ginger is a promising natural galactagogue to improve breast milk volume in the immediate postpartum period without any notable side effect.<sup>8</sup> Maternal galactagogue herbal tea supplementation seems to be useful for enhancing breast milk production and facilitating infant birth weight regain in early postnatal days.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Özkalkaya et al. (2018) revealed that mothers with premature babies and who are treated in neonatal intensive care unit, consumption of galactagogue herbal tea will increase lactation.<sup>10</sup>

In another randomized, double-blind study in Thailand compared the milk output of mothers taking either dried ginger 500 mg or placebo twice daily starting within 2 hours after delivery. On day 3, mothers receiving ginger produced a statistically significantly greater volume of milk than those receiving placebo, 191 ml per 24 hours compared to 135 mL per 24 hours.<sup>11</sup> Kaushik D, Mathew S. (1988) The diet of mothers during pregnancy and lactation has a direct influence on her infant's health status. The food consumption survey revealed that 6 different supplementary food items--ajwain ka laddu, gond ka laddu, battia ka laddu, haldi laddu, lidh ka laddu, and soth ka laddu--were widely consumed by lactating women in ball form.

A nutritional analysis of these supplementary foods indicated that a 250-gram serving is sufficient for meeting a third of the protein and carbohydrate requirements of a lactating woman. It was reported that the diet of lactating women is given greater attention in the immediate postpartum period than in is in later stages of lactation.<sup>12</sup>

### ***On depression***

A meta-analysis was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of herbal medicines in treatment

of postpartum depression and maternal-infant attachment in Semnan University of Medical Sciences, Semnan, Iran. Some herbal medicines showed a significant effect on maternal-infant attachment and feelings toward baby scale. The study revealed that the herbal medicines can be considered as an alternative option in treatment of postpartum depression. Also, maternal-infant attachment and feelings toward baby scale were affected by herbal medicines.<sup>13</sup>

### On Breast Engorgement

A randomized trial in women with breast engorgement compared warm compresses to warm compresses containing a mixture of dried herbs, including ginger, lemon grass, Stapf leaves and leaf sheaths, Acacia concinna leaves, tamarind leaves, Citrus hystrix (kaffir lime) peels, Blumea balsamifera (sambong) leaves, salt and camphor. Both treatments relieved the pain of engorgement, but women who received the compress with herbs had greater pain relief than those who received the warm compress alone.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

In our nation, various types of herbal products and remedies are applied in the process of pregnancy. These products are in practice since ancient times. Most of the herbal remedies are safe and having significant impact on the pregnancy, breast milk production, postnatal depression and breast engorgement. The remedies are cost effective and household. Some of the remedies are used in day to day life while some of them are especially related with pregnancy. The study concluded that, herbal medicines can be used during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care after proper validation of the plants.

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