

## **Herbs for Mother's Care Postpartum**

by Demetria Clark

(Sidebar—should appear near beginning of article.)

### **Instructions for Herbal Preparations**

These basic herbal formulation instructions will assist you with the formulas in this article.

**Infusion:** Pour boiling water over the plant matter and allow it to steep between 20 minutes and overnight for a medicinal infusion. I let my infusions steep for a generous amount of time, as it is important that they are medicinally potent, since I suggest infusions for so many tonic and medicinal uses.

Infusions are made from the more fragile parts of the plant. There are a few exceptions to this. Valerian, for example, is a root prepared as an infusion because of its high volatile oil content.

**Decoctions:** This method is used to get the healing constituents from more tenacious plant material, such as bark, roots or nuts. Allow the plant matter to simmer gently in water for 20 minutes. A decoction is also the preferred method of preparation for pre-blended roots and leaves. Allow the decoction to steep for 30 minutes to an hour after it has been removed from heat.

**Amount of herb used for decoction or infusion:** 1 tablespoon dried herb or 2 tablespoons fresh herb per cup of water. Teas can be made by the quart and refrigerated for convenient consumption.

**Extracts:** Extracts are easy to make and a convenient way to take herbs. Place as much of the herb as you want into a glass jar. Then add beverage alcohol, such vodka or brandy, to a depth of three fingers higher than herbal matter if dried herbs are used or two fingers higher if fresh herbs are used. Close the jar and allow it to sit in the sunlight for a few days to soak in the healing power of the sun and then put it away until done. If it is macerating during a full moon, put it outside to gather the moon's energy also. Many people allow extracts to sit for only a few weeks to a month. I allow mine to sit for over four months in order for them to become as potent as possible. Always store your extracts in glass in a dark, dry spot. When finished, pour the extract through a cloth, such as layers of cheesecloth. Squeeze the remaining herbs thoroughly to remove as much fluid from them as possible. Extracts can be made of single herbs or herbal amalgamations, depending on your needs. Some run the extracted herbs through a juicer and strain them. Extracts can be taken straight or in juice.

### **Appropriate strength of alcohol for extracts:**

35–40% (70–80 proof) alcohol for leaves and flowers

40–60% for barks, roots and seeds

90% for Kava Root. (Kava is best fat-extracted because it is fat soluble. Fat extraction uses an oil, like coconut.)

Eighty-proof alcohol has an alcohol content of 40%. These alcohol percentages are just baselines. You may find some herbs work better for you with different percentages.

This is the traditional method of making extracts, called the “simplers” method. Some herbs are best made into teas, rather than extracts

**Tinctures:** A tincture is a diluted extract, traditionally. The tincture is diluted with water and is one-fifth as strong as the original extract. Unfortunately, the terms “extract” and “tincture” are often confused. An extract is the mother of a tincture and five times stronger.

(Article beginning)

The following herbs for common postpartum problems support mother in a holistic fashion. If she has been given any type of drug, please properly research the drug and herb combination.

Moms will need extra nutrition, and this tea is a staple in my herbal and doula practice. Clients love it, as do the midwives and family members.

### **YOU ROCK! Mamma Tea and Infusion**

2 parts chamomile flower (*Matricaria recutita*)

2 parts hibiscus flower (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)

1 part rose petal (*Rosa spp.*)

1/8 part lavender flower (*Lavendula officinalis*)

1/4 part rose hips (*Rosa canina*)

3 parts lemon balm leaf (*Melissa officinalis*)

Make this by the gallon. It is rich in nervines, vitamins and minerals. Mom, family and care providers can drink this throughout the day, hot or cold.

### Delayed Placenta

- For a delayed placenta you can use angelica root extract (*Angelica sinensis*). Place a drop under the tongue and drink with a swig of water. This will swiftly bring the placenta.
- Hot basil leaf (*Ocimum basilicum*) infusion smells and tastes great, as well as producing results. Drink this by the cupful.
- Make a feverfew flower (*Tanacetum parthenium*) infusion when labor starts by adding four teaspoons of the herb to a quart jar, fill with boiling water and cap. Allow to sit at room temperature for thirty minutes, then refrigerate. This keeps the infusion fresh, in the case of a longer birth.

### Hemorrhage

All hemorrhage mixtures should be made ahead of time.

- Prepare a hemorrhage extract from:

1 part yarrow flower extract (*Achillea millefolium*)

1 part shepherd's purse seed, leaf or flower extract (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

Drink a half-teaspoon in warm water every half hour.

- Make an infusion using equal parts raspberry leaf and nettle. This can be drunk as a beverage.

- Make an extract blend using this recipe:

1 part shepherd's purse seed, flower or leaf (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

1/4 part blue cohosh root (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*)

1 part motherwort leaf (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

1 part witch hazel leaf or bark (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Give mother two dropperfuls orally. You can follow with juice. Repeat in one minute, if needed, then again in ten minutes.

- Or use:

1 part motherwort flower and leaf extract (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

1 part witch hazel leaf or bark extract (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

2 parts shepherd's purse flower, seed and leaf extract (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

1 part bayberry bark or root extract (*Myrica cerifera*)

Use two dropperfuls as above and repeat if needed in ten minutes.

If a woman is hemorrhaging, please follow proper protocols and seek appropriate medical attention.

Transport if the herbs are having no effect.

### Afterpains

Afterpains are caused by the contraction of the uterus. They are generally worse after the second child.

- Alleviate pain by having the mother relax and nurse regularly (this will really hurt, but it will contract the uterus faster), and try the following herbal extracts or combine them in an extract blend: cottonwood bark, black haw and cramp bark. This can be prepared as a tincture and given in doses of 20 drops two to three times a day.

- Apply the following after birth pain relief extract

2 parts motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

1 part lavender flowers (*Lavendula officinalis*)

1 part chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)

1 part cramp bark (*Viburnum opulus*)

1 part lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Use 20–30 drops two to three times a day.

### Night Sweats

Make a tea from strawberry leaf. Drink a cup before bed.

### **Varicosities**

Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) can be used as a base for many types of remedies for varicose veins, vaginal area varicosities and hemorrhoids.

1 cup 80 proof alcohol

1 cup water

1 cup witch hazel leaves (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Cover the leaves with the alcohol and water. You can add more leaves if you want. After four weeks strain and bottle. Add five to ten drops cypress oil, if desired. Apply to affected area with a cool cloth.

### **Hemorrhoids**

- Apply the following herbal teas, once cooled, to the area: St. John's wort, witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), plantain leaf (*Plantago major*), sage (*Salvia off.*), parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*), shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*).
- The extracts or tinctures of these plants can also be used as a compress.
- Create afterwipes by applying witch hazel extract (*Hamamelis virginiana*) to soft tissue or cloth and using it to wipe the affected area if traditional wiping is uncomfortable. These can also be used for tears and swelling. Cotton pads from the drug store placed in a small plastic food container and covered with witch hazel extract (*Hamamelis virginiana*) also make wonderful healing wipes for mom. I suggest using cotton flannel cloths.

### **Difficulty Urinating**

- Add a few drops of peppermint essential oil to the toilet before mom goes to the bathroom. Relaxation and deep breathing also helps.
- Encourage the mother to use a vaginal steam. Find an old chamber pot chair or cut a hole in the seat of a thrift store chair and chop the legs down to a foot and a half. Then when the mother feels she needs to go but is unable, place a bowl full of hot water with steeping lavender flower (*Lavandula officinalis*), peppermint leaf (*Menthe piperita*) and comfrey leaf (*Symphytum officinale*) under the chair. Wrap the mother in blankets and have her sit over the steam. (Don't fill the bowl completely, in case the mother accidentally urinates in the bowl. This may happen when she feels soothed and her body relaxes.) Make sure the steam is not too hot or too close, so she will not get burned. Women can also use the steam for yeast infections, vaginal infections and so on.

### **For Tears and Episiotomies**

I suggest allowing a small tear versus a large cut. The body can repair itself much more easily.

- A perineum wash can be made with a diluted infusion of lavender flower. To a cup of warm water add ¼ cup of lavender infusion. Add a drop of tea tree or patchouli oil to a liter of water or the lavender infusion. Rinse the vulva after urinating. This is used to sooth swollen and sore vaginal tissues after birth.
- Apply ice immediately after the repair is finished to decrease swelling.
- Apply aloe vera gel (best if extracted directly from the plant, as commercial types can contain irritating preservatives). You can break off a leaf and squeeze out the fresh gel and apply to the effected area.
- Encourage the mother to get plenty of fresh air. Exposure to sunlight speeds healing. This is at times an unrealistic recommendation. I just encourage mom to get fresh air, as exposing the bottom to the air is not always easy or appropriate for your neighborhood!
- Have mother decrease activity; severe tears heal faster with bed rest.
- Increase mother's internal dosage of vitamin E to 600 mg/day.
- Use comfrey leaf (*Symphytum officinale*) for compresses and sitz bath. The mother can also drink it to promote healing.
- Calendula flower (*Calendula officinalis*), comfrey leaf (*Symphytum officinale*), St. John's wort flower (*Hypericum perforatum*) and plantain leaf (*Plantago major*) have all been used successfully as ointments or in sitz baths.
- Recommend sitz baths with infusion of vulnerary herbs (see below).

## Sitz Baths

- Sitz blend

To 3 cups simmering water add:

2 tablespoons comfrey leaf (*Symphytum officinale*)

2 tablespoons St. John's wort flower (*Hypericum perforatum*)

4 tablespoons calendula flower (*Calendula officinalis*)

Turn off the heat. Allow it to steep for 20 minutes. Pour into shallow bath. Add four drops lavender essential oil (*Lavendula off.*) and two drops cypress essential oil. Mix well to disperse essential oil.

- Postpartum Sitz Bath

2 parts plantain flower (*Plantago major*)

1 part calendula flower (*Calendula officinalis*)

1 part comfrey leaf (*Symphytum officinale*)

1 part burdock (*Arctium lappa*)

1/2 part violet flower and leaf (*Viola odorata*)

1 part yarrow flower (*Achillea millefolium*)

1/2 part lady's mantle flower and leaf (*Alchemilla vulgaris*)

1/2 part lemon balm leaf (*Melissa officinalis*)

Mix well. You can add sea salt to the mixture if you wish. Add approximately one cup of herb and salt blend to six quarts boiling water, strain and add to shallow bath. You can also use as a compress.

- Or try the following blend:

1 part uva ursi leaf (*Arctostaphylos uva ursi*)

1 part shepherd's purse leaf, seed (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

1/2 part myrrh gum powder (*Commiphora momol*)

1/2 part garlic (Either dried or fresh. If fresh, use 1–2 cloves. Use whole; do not cut or smash as the fresh oil can be very strong and irritating.)

1/2 part comfrey root (*Symphytum officinale*)

1/2 part sea salt

Mix well. You can add sea salt to the mixture if you wish. Add approximately one cup of herb and salt blend to six quarts boiling water, strain and add to shallow bath. You can also use as a compress.

- Another popular sitz bath blend contains:

1 cup sea salt

1/2 cup plantain leaf (*Plantago major*)

1/2 cup calendula flower (*Calendula officinalis*)

Use six cups of water.

- Oak bark (*Quercus robur*), rosemary leaf (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), witch hazel leaf or bark (*Hamamelis virginiana*) and yarrow flower (*Achillea millefolium*) are great for healing sitz baths. If the mother is stitched, the bath should be limited to once a day. Other great herbs and herbal sitz baths for the perineum are calendula flower (*Calendula officinalis*), St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), essential oil of cypress and lavender essential oil.

Handling postpartum issues naturally gives the mother more control and is generally less invasive than going to a doctor. Make sure the mother knows when to seek additional medical care.

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