

Description

Natural Remedies and Choices in Maternity Care

Kerry Pollard (she/her) – Senior Lecturer in Midwifery, University of Central Lancashire

Social @xkerryxannx

Published in The Practising Midwife Volume 28 Issue 3 May 2025, Page 23 (online edits 9/06/2025)

https://doi.org/10.55975/RSCF7244

More people are turning to complementary and alternative therapies to support medical conditions and seeking traditional remedies as an alternative or complement to conventional treatments.[1] As such, it is vital that midwives, maternity care professionals and those working with families are aware of the range of natural therapies available and develop knowledge of their impact and interactions.

World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledges the value of traditional medicine and has developed a Traditional Medicine Strategy to strengthen the role of traditional medicine in promoting public health.[2] Pregnant women are increasingly exploring natural homeopathic remedies to support them throughout pregnancy and childbirth.[3]

A common misconception is that all-natural remedies are inherently safe, but this is not always the case. Some herbal remedies contain ingredients that can be harmful to a developing foetus if taken during pregnancy.[4]

Definitions in practice (online addition)

Natural remedies and medicines refer to treatments derived from plants, minerals, and other naturally occurring sources used to support health, prevent illness, or treat conditions, often with a focus on the body's self-healing ability. These include herbal medicine, homeopathy, aromatherapy, naturopathy, traditional practices (like Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine), and therapies such as acupuncture, massage, and dietary supplementation. However, the term natural can be conflated with neutral or having no consequences or impact. Yet, natural remedies can and do illicit pharmacological reactions and responses – indeed, much of modern medicine is based on these pharmacological dynamics and interactions. Therefore, it is crucial for health professionals to be clear about the differences including the properties of key therapies and remedies that childbearing women, people and families may be accessing, requesting and using during pregnancy, birth and beyond. For example, there are significant variations between herbal and homeopathic medicines. As clarified by Denise Tiran, in her letter submitted in response to this article (see letter copy below):

"*There is a vast difference between herbal and homeopathic medicines, both in their preparation and in their use.*" (Denise Tiran)

Denise shared some useful definitions that will support developing awareness, improving safety in practice:

"Herbal remedies arise from plants and act pharmacologically, in exactly the same way as prescribed drugs. They can interact with conventional medicines and may cause significant adverse reactions."

"Homeopathic remedies do NOT act pharmacologically but are an energetic medicine derived from plants, minerals and even animals. They may be produced from many of the same plants as used herbal medicine but may be toxic in their original format. The extreme dilution of the substances used in homeopathic medicines means that the end product has little or no chemical constituents remaining. Dilution is combined with rapid molecular agitation to activate the energetic potential of the substance and, when used correctly, will not cause *adverse* effects (although common positive healing reactions can be unpleasant). Prescribing of homeopathic medicines is complex and dependent on the precise symptom picture of each individual."

The role of homeopathy in postnatal recovery

The postnatal period is a popular time for homeopathic remedies, when concerns about risks to a developing foetus no longer apply. After childbirth, the body undergoes numerous healing processes, including:

- Placental site repair
- Perineal tearing and episiotomy healing
- Caesarean section recovery
- Cracked nipples and mastitis
- Postpartum swelling and bruising

Arnica: A natural remedy for healing

Arnica is a widely used homeopathic remedy for postpartum recovery, it has been used for centuries to aid healing, pain relief and inflammation reduction.[5] The safest way to take arnica after childbirth is in homeopathic form. It can also be applied topically as a balm, oil, gel or ointment – though it should never be used on open wounds.

Benefits of arnica for postnatal recovery

- Reduces swelling and bruising: arnica helps decrease postpartum swelling and accelerates the healing of bruises from labour or caesarean sections.[6]
- Eases muscle soreness and joint pain: it provides relief from the aches and stiffness commonly experienced after childbirth.[7]
- Supports faster tissue repair: arnica stimulates the body's natural healing processes, promoting the recovery of damaged tissues and skin.[5]
- Relieves postpartum bleeding and discomfort: it helps minimise excessive postnatal bleeding and uterine cramping.[8]
- Soothes engorgement and mastitis: arnica can help reduce breast inflammation and discomfort associated with engorgement or mastitis in breastfeeding mothers.[7]
- Aids emotional well-being: some studies suggest that arnica may help with stress relief and mood stabilisation, supporting emotional recovery after childbirth.[7]

Cautions and safety guidelines

Despite its many benefits, arnica in its raw form is toxic and should never be ingested. Additionally, breastfeeding mothers should consult a healthcare professional before using it to ensure safety for both them and their baby. Some individuals may also be allergic to arnica, particularly those with sensitivities to plants in the Asteraceae family and should exercise caution.[7]

When used correctly, arnica can be a valuable and effective aid in postpartum recovery, supporting faster healing, pain relief and overall well-being. **TPM**

References

1. Mortada EM. Evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine in current medical practice. Cur?us. 2024;16(1):e52041-e52041. doi.org/10.7759/cureus.52041.
2. WHO traditional medicine strategy: 2014-2023. WHO. https://iris. who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/92455/9789241506090_eng.pdf. Published May 15, 2013. Accessed February 14, 2025. https://www.who. int/publications/i/item/9789241506096.
3. Dodworth K, Stewart E. Legitimating complementary therapies in the NHS: Campaigning, care and epistemic labour. Health. 2022;26(2):244-262. doi.org/10.1177/1363459320931916.
4. Herbal medicines. NHS. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/herbalmedicines. Published 2022. Accessed February 12, 2025.
5. Smith AG, Miles VN, Holmes DT, Chen X, Lei W. Clinical trials, potential mechanisms, and adverse effects of arnica as an adjunct medication for pain management. Medicines. 2021;8(10):58. doi. org/10.3390/medicines8100058.
6. Gaertner K, Baumgartner S, Walach H. Is homeopathic arnica effective for postoperative recovery? A meta-analysis of placebocontrolled and active comparator trials. Front Surg. 2021;8:680930. doi. org/10.3389/fsurg.2021.680930.
7. Drugs and Lactation Database (LactMed®). Arnica. National Institute Child Health Human Development. Published 2024. Accessed February 14, 2025.
8. Lombaerts C, Vanthuyne H. Teaching midwives homeopathy – A Belgian pilot project. J Altern Complement Med. 2018;21:16-23. doi. org/10.1016/j.eujim.2018.05.013.

Letter to Editor, submitted by Denise Tiran – 15th May 2025

Dear Editor,

It was refreshing to see an article about natural remedies in the recent issue of TPM. However, there are some concerns which I would like to raise.

Whilst the author acknowledges the increasing use of natural remedies across the world, there is some confusion as to what the term “natural remedies” involves. There is a vast difference between herbal and homeopathic medicines, both in their preparation and in their use. As this article is short, this fundamental point should have been made clear so that midwives understand the difference.

Herbal remedies arise from plants and act pharmacologically, in exactly the same way as prescribed drugs. They can interact with conventional medicines and may cause significant adverse reactions.

Homeopathic remedies do NOT act pharmacologically but are an energetic medicine derived from plants, minerals and even animals. They may be produced from many of the same plants as used herbal medicine but – as the author correctly points out – may be toxic in their original format. The extreme dilution of the substances used in homeopathic medicines means that the end product has little or no chemical constituents remaining. Dilution is combined with rapid molecular agitation to activate the energetic potential of the substance and, when used correctly, will not cause *adverse* effects (although common positive healing reactions can be unpleasant). Prescribing of homeopathic medicines is complex and dependent on the precise symptom picture of each individual.

Homeopathic arnica is frequently considered a remedy for trauma, bruising and inflammation and many women take the tablet form following perineal suturing. However, it is not the only remedy for these symptoms and others may be more appropriate. Incorrect or overdose of homeopathic remedies can lead to a “reverse proving” in which the remedy starts to cause the symptoms it is designed to treat. Therefore, inappropriate use of arnica, notably prolonged use, can exacerbate bruising following birth, rather than resolve it.

Arnica oil is not a homeopathic substance (nor is it an essential oil as used in aromatherapy). It is sometimes used as a carrier oil for massage but should be avoided in pregnancy, birth or the postnatal period. The author notes that some people may be allergic to arnica – but this applies to the *herbal* format, not the homeopathic version. It should be noted that internet sources of information often confuse the herbal and homeopathic versions.

My concern is that the brevity of the article may cause confusion for midwives and undermine the serious risks of

adverse issues arising from incorrect use.

Best wishes

Denise

Category

1. Features
2. Nurture
3. Nurture Others
4. TPM Articles
5. TPM Journal

Tags

1. 2025
2. complementary therapy

Date Created
1st May 2025