

## THE USE OF HERBS DURING EARLY PREGNANCY, SOME WARNINGS ABOUT THE INTERNET.

**This article was mainly for USA & Canadian readers** although it applies to anyone seeking information on the Internet. It was originally posted to some newsgroups in April 2005.

Readers should always remember that mechanisms for policing the accuracy of information on web sites is almost nonexistent. This fact is increasingly being used by unscrupulous marketers to scam money out of people. **Some of these people do not care if their advice or products could cause harm.**

I have become alarmed at inaccurate information on herbs for pregnancy finding its way onto newsgroups and websites (even medical ones). This information is often written by people who have no sound training in the subjects. Even the authors of medical research papers are using references on the traditional use of herbs taken from popular books. Many of those books are written by people with no formal training in herbal medicine, and very questionable "traditional experience".

Information is also frequently taken from old herbals, without a second thought being given as to **if modern knowledge has indicated particular herbs might pose dangers in early pregnancy.**

**Some of the advice popping up on newsgroups has the potential to cause far more harm than good.**

### POTENTIAL HARM OF WRONG ADVICE ON HERBS.

Some herbs when consumed as teas or as food supplements, might interfere with the development of a fetus in the first 3 months of development. Therefore, in the first 3 months of pregnancy, it is wise to avoid any nonfood herbs or herbs that:

#### 1) Have any known hormonal activity for example:

**Hibiscus tea** has been shown to decrease male fertility - a hormonal action.

**Fennel tea** may be fine for breastfeeding, but it may have a mild hormonal action which in early pregnancy might be unwise.

Some **Native American herbs**, while being fantastic for gynecological conditions should not be used in early pregnancy. Indeed, in most cases, they were not used in early pregnancy in that culture; they tended to be reserved for much later in pregnancy after the early developmental processes in the fetus had ceased.

#### 2) Herbs which contain known hazardous chemicals, for example:

**Borage herb** contains alkaloids that while probably having little effect on an adult, just might disrupt liver formation in an early fetus. Likewise **coltfoot** and **comfrey** also contain these alkaloids.

**Sage tea** (*Salvia officinalis*): While being fantastic to gargle with for a sore throat, should not be swallowed in any volume during early pregnancy.

**3) Hydrosols:** There are now several web sites (particularly Canadian) promoting hydrosols for internal medication. Whilst many should be safe, (provided they are free of micro organisms), some of the herbs being used do have safety issues over their internal use. Therefore, my advice is to avoid drinking any of them in early pregnancy.

The above is but a small sample of herbs that should be avoided in early pregnancy. Add to the above, herbs originating in countries where quality controls are suspect. For example, samples of Chinese herbs have been detected containing steroids. Samples of Indian herbs have been found to contain dangerous heavy metals as well as banned pesticides. Whilst not being a huge threat to adults, some of these substances should not be introduced to a developing fetus at the stage when complex biochemical developmental processes are occurring.

### **INTERNET NEWSGROUP & WEB SITE ADVICE.**

The same thing is happening with herbs as happened years ago with essential oils. This is that many people think they can learn all they need to know from books; from taking low quality training courses, or from the Internet. Some of these people then come across as being very knowledgeable on newsgroups, or with their advice on commercial web sites. Often these people have not been taught how to evaluate the accuracy of what their teachers have told them, but instead have simply fallen for marketing hype.

In the USA in particular, you have a tradition of spreading herbal knowledge without its worth or **origin** being evaluated. With a lot of herbal medicine it is vital to know the medical and botanical sciences and to know the side effects of giving the wrong herbs at the wrong time, or for the wrong conditions. It is this aspect of the therapy which is often lacking in their own training of some big name 'herbalists' in the US and Canadian scene. When I trained in the UK in the mid 80s, we had a few American and Canadian students who devoted 4 years of their life to train here. Reason they did that then was because back home there were few if any training courses that **taught the sciences of herbs or medicine properly**. Those good practitioners are now working in your countries, but they are few and far between. Fortunately, there are now some good courses in the USA, but equally there are still many taught by teachers who do not know their subjects in sufficient detail.

**The Internet has engendered a culture of grab what information you can and don't bother getting professional help. In any profession one has to pay for sound advice due partly to the length of time it takes to train. Why do you think a REAL Shaman takes up to 10 years to train? You may not pay him or her in cash, but you sure do have to pay, either with a chicken, pig or a pouch of tobacco. You cannot possibly expect to get professional advice from people who have done a few weekends courses in the subject, or who have just taken what they know out of books.**

**On newsgroups I have seen some really bad advice given on herbs, but I usually don't jump in because in adults the advice wont cause much of a problem. However, with pregnancy this is another ballgame and you must beware of taking and giving advice on this subject as far as herbs are concerned. If you happen to be on any newsgroups involving pregnancy feel free to repost this or issue your own warnings.**

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