

Herbs to Avoid During Preconception and Pregnancy

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Some believe that natural is synonymous with safe. This can be dangerous. With the passage of the Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act (DSHEA) in 1994, more labels will list an herb's expected action. However, the active ingredient(s) in many herbs and herbal supplements are still not known. Herbs should be used with the same caution you would use with any drug.

The following list consists of the most commonly used herbs that should be avoided during preconception, pregnancy, or during any cycle when a woman may be pregnant. Some herbs on this list might be utilized by a trained herbalist during preconception and pregnancy, and under such proper guidance **can** be safe. However, a woman should not self-medicate with the following botanicals.

These herbs are grouped according to their action.

Sterility Promoters

Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*)
Stoneseed root (*Lithospermum ruderales*)
Thistles (*Cardus benedictus*) (*Cnicus ochrocentrus*)

Implantation Preventers

Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*)
Rue (*Ruta graveolens*)
Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*)
Elder (several varieties of the elder tree)
Smartweed leaves (*Polygonum hydropiper*)

Menstrual Promoters or Emmenagogues:

Herbs that stimulate uterine contractions

Birthwort (*Aristolochia* family)
Blue cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*)
Cotton root bark (*Gossypium herbaceum*)
Ergot (*Caulophyllum*)
Goldenseal (*Hydrastis Canadensis*)
Gotu kola (*Centalla asiatica*)
Ma huang (*Ephedra sinica*)
Peruvian bark (*Cinchona officinalis*)

Herbs that stimulate menstrual flow

Agave (*Agave americana*)
Bethroot (*Trillium erectum*)
Black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)
Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)
Feverfew (in flower) (*Tanacetum parthenium*)
Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*)

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)
Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*)
Marijuana female flowers (*Cannabis sativa*)
Mistle toe (*Viscum album*)
Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiacaca*)
Mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*)
Osha root (*Ligusticum porterii*)
Pennyroyal (*Hedoma pulegiodes*)
Poke root (*Phytolacca decandra*)
Pulsatilla (*Anemone pulsatilla*)
Rue (*Ruta graveolens*)
Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)
Wormwood (*Artemesia absinthum*)
Yarrow (*Achilea millefolium*)

Herbs high in volatile oils (which can stimulate or irritate the uterus)

Basil
Catnip
Clove oil
Eucalyptus oil
Lemon balm
Marjoram
Nutmeg
Oregano oil
Pennyroyal
Peppermint oil
Rosemary oil
Thyme oil
True sage oil

Note: These herbs are safe for culinary use, but should be avoided as therapeutic oils.

Plants high in alkaloids which can stimulate the uterus

Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*)
Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)
Oregon grape root (*Berberis aquifolium*)

Strong Herbal Laxatives

Aloe vera
Cascara sagrada
Castor oil
Purging buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*)
Rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*)
Senna (*Senna Alexandria*)
Yellow dock (*Rumex crispus*)

Strong Diuretics

Juniper berries (*Juniperus communis*)

Uva ursi (bearberry) (*Arctostaphylos*)

A Note about Ginger

Ginger has long been used to treat nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. A review of ginger's use as an anti-nausea remedy concluded that ginger is safe in pregnancy "provided normal doses are consumed." S. Fulder and M. Tenne, "Ginger as an Anti-Nausea Remedy in Pregnancy: The Issue of Safety," *HerbalGram* 38 (1996): 47 - 50 (Archives available online at www.herbalgram.org)

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