

Herbs to Avoid During Pregnancy

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A literature search of the ethnopharmacology of plants used for their abortifacient or uterine stimulating actions provides a long list of plants to avoid. According to Marderosian and Liberti in their useful but rather biased book '**Natural Product Medicine**', 565 species from 125 families have such effects.

These otherwise extremely useful remedies often share chemistry that in some way irritates the placenta or causes muscular contractions in the uterus. Limiting ourselves to those plants most often encountered in western Phytotherapy, the following groupings can be identified :

Bitters

From the material concerning bitters already covered, it is clear that the general metabolic stimulation and especially that of smooth muscle and the emmenagogue results, are contra-indicated during pregnancy. All strong bitters should be excluded, with especial attention to :

Artemisia abrotanum Southernwood
Artemisia absinthium Wormwood
Artemisia vulgare Mugwort
Berberis vulgaris Barberry
Chelidonium majus Celandine
Hydrastis canadensis Golden Seal
Ruta graveolens Rue
Tanacetum parthenium Feverfew
Tanacetum vulgare Tansy

Alkaloid containing plants

Alkaloids are a diverse group of secondary plant constituents that have a wide range of pharmacological impact upon the body. The stronger representatives are to be avoided, including the caffeine containing social drugs **Coffee** and **Tea**. These include :

Berberis vulgaris Barberry
Colchicum autumnale Autumn crocus
Hydrastis canadensis Golden Seal
Podophyllum peltatum Mandrake
Sanguinaria canadensis Blood root
Sarothamnus scoparius Broom

Oil containing plants

Many of the essential oils can have a devastating impact on the placenta and foetus is taken internally during pregnancy. **Avoid all Essential oils internally**. However, the whole plant that the oil was distilled from will usually be fine if used in moderation. Important exceptions are:

Juniperus communis Juniper
Mentha pulegium Pennyroyal
Myristica officinalis Nutmeg (in large amounts)
Thuja occidentalis Arbor vitae

Anthraquinone Laxatives

The strong herbal laxatives often owe their effects to the presence of anthraquinones that stimulate peristalsis in the bowel. They may have a similar stimulating impact upon the uterus. If a laxative is needed during pregnancy it should be either a bulk or hepatic laxative. Please refer to appropriate section for more information.

Cassia senna Senna

Rhamnus catharticus Purging Buckthorn

Rhamnus frangula Alder Buckthorn

Rhamnus purshiana Cascara Sagrada

Others

There are other plants that should be avoided which do not fit into such convenient categories. Some are listed here. Male Fern is an example of an anthelmintic remedy for the treatment of worm infestations.

Cinchona spp. Peruvian Bark

Phytolacca spp. Poke

Dryopteris felix-mas Male Fern

Gossypium herbaceum Cotton-Root

Viscum album Mistletoe